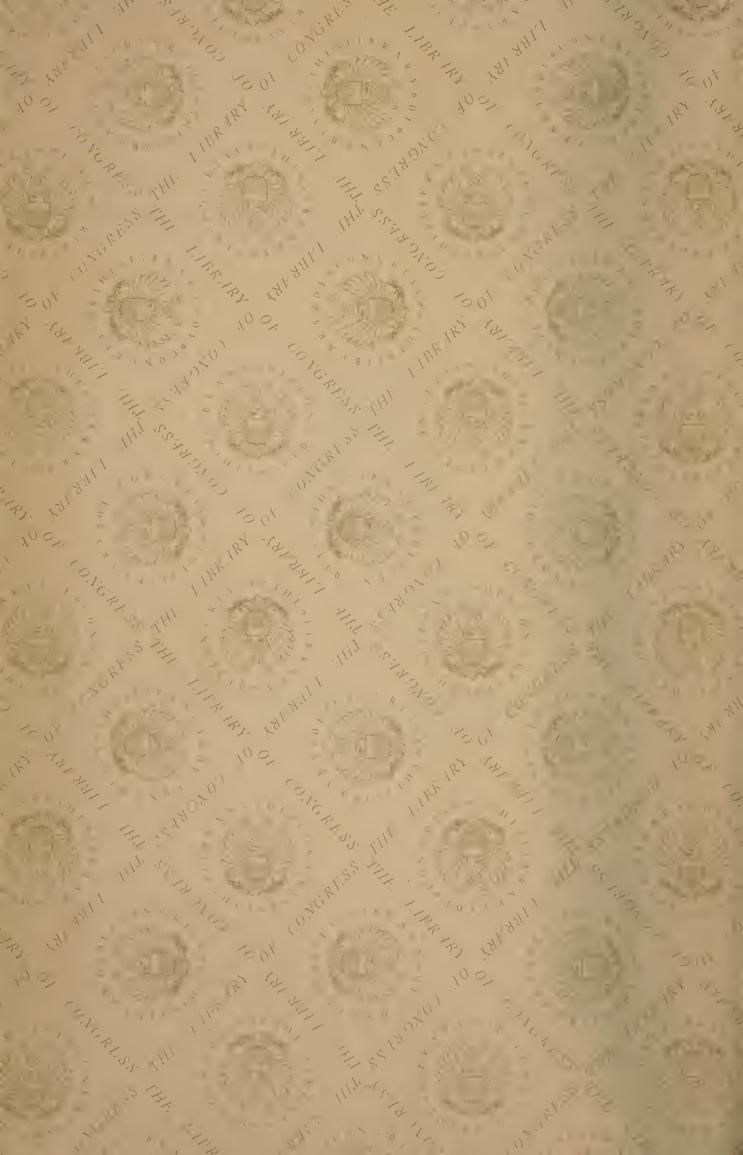
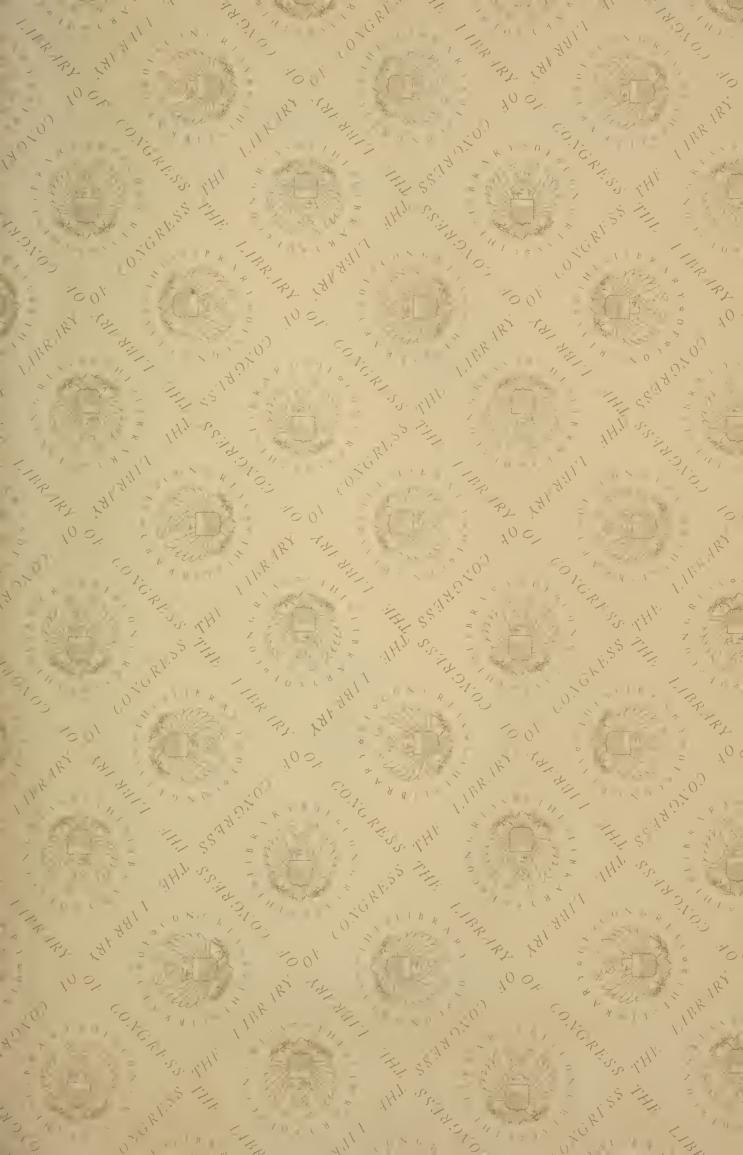


SMILL DEPART







THE MAN FROM SMILING PASS

or: The Honorable Abe Blount

BY

ELIOT H. ROBINSON Author of "Smiles" and "Smiling Pass"

With an illustration in color by

H. WESTON TAYLOR



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FOREWORD

THE scene of this latter-day political and historical romance is laid in one of the five states which join in forming the Southern Highlands, and the manners, customs, and laws — especially those having to do with elections — are based on fact. For obvious reasons, however, I have preferred to create the "State of Cumberland," rather than to name any one of those five states.

The State's Attorney in the story is an official who, in most localities, would have the title of District Attorney.

I wish to make grateful acknowledgment for assistance given me, perhaps unwittingly, by many high public officials, especially by certain Senators and Congressmen who have furnished me with material of a political nature and with apropos stories which they may recognize in these pages, should they ever chance to read them.

ELIOT HARLOW ROBINSON.

"Every man is a politician, whether he will or no, for government does not rest upon the opinions of men, but upon their actions."

CALVIN COOLIDGE.

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PART THE FIRST

ONE DAY

IN WHICH CERTAIN CHARACTERS AND CAUSES
ARE INTRODUCED



THE MAN FROM SMILING PASS

CHAPTER I

THE DEMON DESTROYER

- " ABE."
- "Uh-huh."
- "Desty Fugate's sort uv an uncle uv yourn, hain't he? "
 - "Reckon so."

The answer, laconic but not directly affirmative, since the Cumberland mountaineer rarely says "Yes," came through the darkness in a deep, deliberate voice, and after a pronounced pause. The speaker stopped, struck a match, and held it to the bowl of his pipe, his cupped hands so shielding the flame that it illuminated merely his face, but that - limned for an instant against the blue-black background — appeared like a cameo carved by a humorously inclined artist.

His three companions, who "used" tobacco, mountain-fashion, but did not smoke, likewise paused and instinctively glanced at the countenance thus disclosed. Although as familiar to them as their own, it was one which invariably attracted attention, and the questioner caught himself thinking, with a feeling of mild surprise at the thought, "Abe shore air plain-lookin; hain't hit a fact? Gawd A'mighty hewed him rough . . . and aout uv tough timber. He's maounting oak. You kain't bend him and he'll take a paowerful lot uv

breakin'."

Any student of physiognomy would have approved this crude analysis, after even so brief a study of the subject as the match's short-lived, wavering flame permitted. And he would have found the countenance more than merely strong and "plain-lookin'." It was

as unusual as it was strikingly homely.

Under a stained and shapeless slouch hat appeared a fringe of thick, wiry hair, a lusterless black; the eyebrows were the same, and jutted out, like bushes rooted in the crevices of a granite ledge, over eyes which were iron-gray, deep-set, large and commanding - the type which can become, at will, wholly inscrutable, and yet, at other times, mirror every inward emotion, from blazing wrath to the gentleness of a woman. The nose was large, crooked like an Indian's and almost ludicrously long — although this fact was in part discounted by the unusual length of the whole face, and especially that of the rugged, deeply-cleft chin. The flesh was tightly drawn over the bones, and cheeks and forehead bore strongly chiseled furrows: the face was toned by wind and weather to a russetbrown, somewhat blemished. Except for the eyes, the mouth was its redeeming feature. Too large for symmetrical beauty, it was nevertheless indicative of strength, kindliness and a keen sense of humor. Who was it who wrote, "God gives us our eyes, but we make our own mouths?" The man had made his attractive, but as an underlying heritage it had a suggestion of the pathos common to the lives of the Southern hill-dweller. The face, moreover, held an anomaly. Taken as a whole, it might easily have passed for that of a man of middle-age, and one who had borne sorrows. But the eyes were unquestionably still the eyes of Youth, and fired alike with purpose and enthusiasm. The flame died away. The man ground out the last

glowing spark beneath a heavy heel and again strode forward into the darkness.

"I don't guess he's a-goin' tew be partic'ly glad tew see you to-night, Abe," resumed the first speaker, with a chuckle. "No, I don't reckon he'll ask any uv us tew drap in and set awhile, whatever."

All, save the one whom they addressed as "Abe," laughed dryly, and another voice added, "Shouldn't think you-all'd love tew cut up your own uncle's still."

think you-all'd love tew cut up your own uncle's still."
"I don't, much. But . . ." Pause. "Hit's got tew be done."

"I reckon. But what air you so all-fired sot agin makin' corn licker for, Abe. I recollect thet you used tew drink hit good's the best uv 'em, afore you got tew be sheriff, Abe."

Again there was a moment of silence, broken only by the occasional snapping of twigs beneath the feet of the sheriff and his three deputies, the rustle of branches thrust aside by their sturdy bodies and now and again a sound from sleeping nature about them. Finally the answer came, "Hain't agin the use uv hit, per se . . . 'as such,' I mean, although I've always been agin the abuse uv hit. But naow the Law's agin makin' hit, and as sheriff fer this hyar Caounty I am the law, for the time bein'."

He spoke simply—there was nothing of Louis', "L'Etat, c'est moi," about his statement—and it brought the equally simple agreement, "Which air a fact."

"While the law's as hit air, and I'm an officer charged with enforcin' hit, I a-goin' tew enforce hit. That's all."

It seemed to be conclusive, and for a time the quartet of almost invisible forms trudged stolidly onward and upward, ever upward, in silence, walking a tortuous trail which any one of them could tread almost as easily in the dark as at noonday. But the questioner was by nature loquacious and he soon began again.

"Think that the people aout in the *U*-nited States of Ameriky'll ever change hit again, Abe? The law, I

mean? "

The reply was brief and characteristic of the man. "Don't know. Hain't consarned with that question,

naow. We-all hev got a maounting tew climb and a job tew dew, thar. Better be savin' you breath, Sam."

Mother Nature seconded the suggestion, for they had now reached a spot where the ascent began to grow abruptly precipitous, and, mountain-bred and sinewy as the deputies were, they were soon panting audibly in their efforts to keep pace with their leader, whose long, unaltered stride seemed to devour the ground.

A full half hour they toiled upward, while the narrow, twisting path became rougher and yet more rough as it wound between outcropping ledges of granite and scarcely discernible trunks of many trees. Almost no words were spoken, now. At length they arrived at the summit, a goal which had been marked for them by a broken line of frosted silver, for the nearly full moon was rising, beyond.

Abe reached it first and stopped abruptly, his towering form, silhouetted against the diffused light in the eastern sky, appearing almost gigantic. The other three ranged themselves beside him, likewise pausing, as well they might.

Before and below them lay a small ravine — a broad, shallow bowl-like cavity, rather — filled with a jumble of rocks of all shapes and sizes, and stunted trees and bushes. From each of these the blue-black shadows reached towards them, combining and flowing like dark

water up the nearer side of the declivity almost to their feet. Opposite, perhaps an hundred paces distant, showed the further rim of the bowl, treeless, inky black save for its outline of broken silver. Beyond, in the cloudless night heavens, thick with star-points, shone the three-quarter moon, majestically cold and distant, the clear, cool light from which illuminated the scene, making it beautiful, yet somehow unreal and fantastic—awesome. The climbers had known every step of the way up through the darkness; but they scarcely recognized the familiar spot upon which they looked, illumined though it was.

Like most primitive peoples, those who dwell in the isolated mountain regions, even of our twentieth century America, have something of the savage's passionate worship of natural beauty, but it is coupled with an Anglo-Saxon reticence in expression. The feeling, the appreciation, is present, but they lack power and desire to express it. So the strange, calm, mystic beauty of the scene held all four silently enthralled for a moment.

When, finally, Abe broke the silence, it was not to give words to the thoughts which the exotic beauty of the scene had stirred within his mind — whatever they may have been. He merely stretched out a remarkably long arm, indicated the further side of the bowl, and drawled, "Hit's over thar."

Each man gave an upward hitch to his belt, sagging a little as a result of the stiff climb, tightened the grip of his sinewy hand on the rifle which swung, nicely balanced, at his side, and stepped forward. Now they began to tread noiselessly, without the necessity of command. All of them had been through the same process many times and needed no instruction as to procedure.

In Indian file they followed their chief across the ravine and stealthily up its further side. He crossed the ridge and headed straight for a spot marked by two huge, up-ended slabs of stone which stood, leaning slightly towards each other, almost like man-hewn pilasters at the doorway of some ancient temple ruin, so symmetrical they were. The moonlight, flooding through, indicated a narrow passage between them, and into it the four went, without hesitation. It gave upon a moderately sized walled hollow, almost perfectly concealed and naturally protected—one who did not know its secret would have hunted long and then not found it.

Built against the opposite wall of rock, and now in deep shadow, was a rude structure, scarcely more than a lean-to, and ears and eyes alike informed them that it was, unfortunately, occupied. A thin line of yellow light appeared, outlining the rude door, which sagged unevenly on its rusty hinges; wisps of smoke curled up from the rough stone chimney and drew a filmy, wavering veil across the face of the moon; there came the sound of men's voices in speech and boisterous laughter, and then a snatch of "Bad Bill" Cress's moonshine song, sung in a voice more powerful than melodious.

"You could e . . . e . . . eas'ly tell, By the whiffle uv the smell Thar was licker in the air close by."

At least two other voices joined in the refrain,

"YES, licker in the air close by,
And thar hain't many know hit, but a few;
So pull off your coat and wet up your throat
With the good old maounting dew."

The quartet standing outside in the night glanced at one another. Three of them grinned broadly, and even the stern lips of their leader twitched a little. "Thar hain't many knows hit, but a few." Unfortunately for the singers in their false security the listeners were among the "few."

Sam spoke in a whispered aside, "Hit's shore a cryin's shame tew hev tew spill aout all the good 'corn' thet's in thet thar shack."

A quick glance from Abe silenced him, and the rest were ordered to remain where they stood by a slight gesture of the latter's hand. Alone, the sheriff strode forward through the jumble of rocks which covered the floor of the hollow; he reached the closed door and gave one resounding knock upon it with his heavy fist.

The singer had already commenced the second verse:

"Oh, hyar's tew the pill thet cures all ill, Hit was made from . . ."

But he broke it abruptly off, and the startling demand was followed by an instant of dead silence within the hut. Outside, the only sound was produced by the faint rustling of leaves on a near-by scrubby oak, as they stirred under the breath of the never-tiring mountain breeze.

Then a voice, which carried alike a challenge and a note of distinct uneasiness, demanded, "Who... who's thar?"

"Hit's me . . . Abe Blount. I hev come tew cut up thet thar still uv yourn, Desty." The sheriff made the response in even, unemotional tones.

This time the silence which followed was even more pregnant, for those on the outside knew — although they could hear nothing — that a startled consultation

was being held in strained whispers by the moonshiners. What would be its outcome? Surrender? Or defiance and a fight? Less than a fortnight previous two of a similar deputation had been wounded, one of them mortally, while engaged in an attack upon another illicit still, only a few miles from that very spot.

At length Desty's voice was heard again, this time with a distinct whine. "Naow, Abe. You-all hain't a-goin' tew go agin your own flesh and blood, air you?"

"Reckon you know I don't love fer tew dew hit, Desty. But I've got tew destroy thet still . . . hit's my duty. You've been informed against, and I'm sheriff, sworn tew execute the law in these hyar maountings. Ef you-all'll come aout peaceable I'll let you go home, on ginin' me your word tew come tew Court when you're wanted."

"Damned ef we will!" a younger voice shouted in passionate tones. "Guess us-uns knows who hit war thet 'informed' agin us, you . . ." The rest of the

sentence is stricken from the record.

Patiently, without even raising his voice, Abe answered.

"You're wrong . . . and you know hit, Uins. Thar hain't no sense in gittin' all het up - hit won't help you none. Better come aout, naow . . . or we'll come in."

"So you brung your gang uv sneakin', stinkin' pole-

cats with you! I reckoned so."

"Hain't likely I'd hev come alone, is hit?"

There was more whispering, this time faintly audible through the closed door as the others drew closer and, with growing restlessness, regarded their leader questioningly.

"I'm aimin' tew bust in thet thar door in half a min-

ute, Desty," he announced, quietly.

"Try hit and see what you git!" retorted the

younger voice in belligerent tones. "We've got aour guns p'inted plumb at hit, and . . ."

"Time's up!"

Abe methodically rested the butt of his rifle on the stony ground, steadied himself, using the barrel as a support, raised his foot and drove it against the door almost with the force of a battering-ram. Coincident with the crash came the vicious crack of a rifle. The deputies crowded forward, their own weapons at their hips, fingers resting on the triggers. The door had flown from its ancient hinges and fallen into the cabin, and the light from the fire underneath the still, and from two old lanterns, illuminated a strange picture on either side of the threshold. Where everything had been so peaceful before there was now plenty of action . . . but it was arrested action.

Within the hut stood three sullen-faced men—a gray-bearded mountaineer clad in shirt, overalls and rough boots, and two of his sons, the younger hardly more than a boy — their soiled hands held above their heads. Before them, on the dirt floor, lay three rifles, from the muzzle of one of which a thin wisp of bluish vapor was curling. Facing them, across the threshold, was Abe, balancing himself by means of his gun, his foot still half in the air, and upon his face an almost ludicrous expression of mingled pain and astonishment. His companions' attention was not called to it, however, until he moved. Then he turned, abruptly, gave a hop which carried him to a bowlder at one side of the faint path which led to the door, and seated himself thereon, heavily.

"You hain't hit, air you, Abe?" one of them in-

quired, in a surprised voice.

"Why . . . I reckon I am!" their leader answered, bending over and grasping his ankle with both hands.

The shadow of black anger swept across the countenances of his three followers, and their new spokesman turned back and shot at their captives the wrathful sentence, "Thet means the 'pen 'fer one uv you—or the whole feisty lot, ef we don't find aout which uv you fired thet thar gun. Come naow, speak up. Who done hit?"

"Wait a minute, Sam! I'd ruther not know, I reckon. Fur's I'm consarned, hit war jest an accident. I figure thet one uv 'em, with more hot blood in his veins than cold commonsense in his head, happened tew have his finger on the trigger, and the racket I riz, a-kickin' in the door, startled him intew givin' hit a twitch," remarked Abe in an ordinary tone of voice. Then he addressed his uncle. "Better be gittin' erlong home, naow, Desty. Hit's high time thet your boys war in bed, and Aunt Dasie'll be discommodin' herself abaout you. Leave your guns whar they air . . I'll see tew hit thet you git 'em back, after a while. And I'll send you word when you're wanted a-fore the Court, daown tew Fayville."

Without answering, but with his looks charged with bitter words, the moonshiner strode past him, followed by his two scowling sons. The elder and his father disappeared through the cleft in the rocks, but the other, Uins, stopped there, turned, and spat in the direction of the sheriff.

"I'll git you fer this, Abe Blount . . . I swar I will," he cried shrilly. "Ef hit hain't one way hit'll be another. You're almighty praoud uv bein' called the Caounty's Demon Still Destroyer and gittin' your name in the city newspapers, I reckon; but you hain't a-goin' tew be sheriff hyar another term. I knows haow we-uns uv these maountings feel . . . this hyar's a

free country and we hain't a-goin' tew stand fer no tyrants."

One of the deputies gave a short, sarcastic laugh. "Hain't you the peert boy, Uins! You'd ought tew be tellin' fortunes, erlong with Aunt Lissy Triplett, 'stead uv turnin' your mighty int'lect tew the makin' uv moonshine."

"I'm a-tellin' you," retorted the youth, his voice thick with passion, "Abe hain't a-goin' tew be sheriff much longer, nohaow."

"And I'm agreein' with you, son. Ef you hadn't a been wastin' your time hid up in these hyar hills, the past week, you'd have heerd thet your cousin Abe is a candidate fer State's Attorney fer the Caounty, next election. He's likely tew be prosecutin' you and your paw at the next term uv the court, so you'd better be speakin' pretty, naow."

"Damn him tew Hell!" The boy swung about and plunged into the opening on the trail of his father and brother.

Thus ended the incident — an event commonplace enough in the history of those primitive hills, even in this so-called enlightened age. But its far-reaching consequences were yet to come.

"Air you hurted bad?" inquired the man called Sam, turning a look of mingled curiosity and rough sympathy on the giant leader's foot. Through a clean hole in the side of the army boot the blood was steadily dripping, to form a spreading dark stain on the moonlit ground. The other shook his head. "Hit hain't nothin'... though I don't guess I'm a-goin' tew make home agin withaout a leetle help, maybe. Might's well git busy cuttin' up thet still, boys ... hit's what we come up hyar tew dew."

The three deputies set about their appointed task in methodical fashion, and in a few minutes the boiler, worm and "thumpin'-keg" were smashed and twisted beyond all hope of reconstruction; so, too, was the vat which had held the corn mash — the "beer" they called it — and several gallon jugs, while their erstwhile contents, the colorless, potent whiskey distilled to double strength, was flowing in little rivulets across the hard floor and out through chinks at the base of the rough walls.

"Thar, thet's done!" announced one of them, at last. "Look's like a claoud-burst had broke loose in hyar," he added, critically surveying the havoc which they had wrought.

The men picked up their rifles, together with those left by the departed owners of the now-ruined distillery, and Abe pulled himself erect using his own by way of a crutch. His wounded foot scraped against the rock on which he had been sitting, and a slight gasp of pain

escaped through his clenched teeth.

"Hurtin' you, air hit? Sho', thet's too bad!" The speaker paused; then continued as the result of a sudden inspiration, "Thar hain't no sense in tryin' tew go back the way we clumb up, when thar's a real hospital daown tew Smilin' Pass, right at the foot uv the other side of this hyar maounting, and hit hain't more'n a mile away, scurce. We-uns kin tote you thet fur ef you kain't make hit a-foot, Abe."

"Reckon I can," was the answer, and the party set forth once more, this time down the steep eastern slope of the mountain, now almost as clear as day under the illumination of the moon, their leader hobbling along with his rifle as a crutch, uncomplaining, but with an expression of pain ever-increasing in his eyes. From time to time one of the others unobtrusively lent him a helping hand over a particularly rough spot in the steep path, and so at last they came forth from the denser woods, and just below them lay the little cluster of buildings of "Smiles'" community center — a tiny city set on a hill; a candle whose light could not be hid and had already penetrated far through the dark recesses of that remote and primitive mountain-side. They lay asleep, their roofs now silvery-olive in the moonlight, and none within their walls dreamed that hobbling through the night — wounded in bringing the law into the hills, as some of them had been in bringing the light of education there — was one whose star was destined to rise high and shine far, far beyond the summits of those close-encircling mountaintops. Nor, for that matter, did he dream it.

CHAPTER II

OF FEET, FLESH AND CLAY

"OMIE GAYHEART, I'd be ashamed!" exclaimed the girl's brother, Virgil, as he stepped out of the little hospital — "Smiles'" House of Health — and joined her on the broad, veranda-like boardwalk which connected the House of Happiness, on the right, with the House of Hunger, some distance away to the left. For at Smiling Pass each building had its appropriate name, appearing on neatly lettered signs which were visible from the road which followed the many windings of the stream from the small town of Fayville up into the heart of the primal hills. For a hundred years those shallow waters had slunk down the mountain passes under the discouraging name of "Beaten," but to-day they seemed to leap and laugh about the bowlders with which their bed was strewn as though visibly rejoicing in their new appellation — "Smiling Creek." The mountain-sides were smiling, too, their youth suddenly renewed by the miracle of spring.

Perhaps it was contagious, and the girl laughed for that reason, but her brother evidently ascribed a different cause, for he repeated, "I'd be ashamed—laughing like that at a man who has been shot and is suffering."

Abruptly serious, she replied: "Yes, I know. I suppose that I should be, Virge, but . . . but . . ." Laughter, almost hysterical, overcame her for an instant. Finally she went on, her blue eyes still twinkling. "But he's so awfully funny-looking. Did you ever see

any one so . . . so long drawn aout? I guess I was crying while you and Camille were cutting off his boot and dressing the wound, but I wanted tew laugh even then, and my throat got all achy, trying not tew. I never imagined such a foot . . . it would make two of mine, with some left over, I reckon."

Omie thrust forward one of her own trimly shod feet — it would have been difficult to believe that for fifteen years they had gone bare nine months out of every twelve - regarded it whimsically and nodded in affirmation of her statement; nodded so vigorously that her fluffy, flaxen hair flew like thistledown about her merry face. Virgil could not wholly restrain the sympathetic smile which came to his lips, for his love for his little sister was almost a passion. For seventeen years he had cherished her as few brothers do their sisters, and for ten of them he had been father to her as well, now overlenient, now strict, but always protecting and adoring.

As he looked down at the child-woman his heart swelled with silent pride of her, and with a certain selfsatisfaction in the thought that he had shared in the marvel by which the wilderness flower had been transformed into a refined and cultivated bloom which had, however, lost none of its native sweetness or simplicity. Without what he had helped to bring to pass in those hills, Omie might already have become the wife of some illiterate mountaineer, a girl-mother, and so on the way to join the countless other mountain women who are old before their first youth is fully spent. But, with his aid, the hand of enlightened civilization had been stretched forth to save childhood for her benefit, and, although her body had matured and her brain become the abiding-place of what their neighbors called "booklarnin'" and a seriousness of purpose beyond the average, she still retained all of her childlike spontaneity and enthusiasm.

For a woman of the Cumberland mountains Omie was really well-educated, now. She was a student in the Teachers' Training Course at the Community Center, pledged to devote herself to carrying the torch of education among her own people; supervised exercise had increased her natural grace, and she wore her citymade clothing as though to the manner born. But there was a freshness about her face, which had never known so much as a speck of powder, a clarity in the depths of her violet-blue eyes, that had never grown strained and weary with late hours or watching motion pictures, which her city sisters would well have envied.

Many might have frankly envied her her Anglo-Saxon loveliness, as well. Some would have declared that her laughing upper lip was a shade too short, but at least the teeth which her ready smile disclosed were perfect and snowy white. They might have said that the very tip of her straight little nose proclaimed a distant strain of Celtic blood, and had too many freckles; but any one would have indeed been carpingly critical to have found fault with the molding of her rose-tinted cheeks, upon the left one of which the shadowy suggestion of a dimple came and went; or of her firm, yet rounded, chin; or her eyes, like pools reflecting the blue of the sky, generally, yet almost as variable as the sky itself, and fringed with long, dark lashes whose tips had a fascinating upward curl. No, nor of her shimmering hair, golden in the sunlight; russet-brown, flecked with gold, in the shadow.

Surely that is sufficient description for a simple mountain maid, but we are seeing her now through the eyes of one who loved her.

Omie looked up, caught the admiration in her broth-

er's regard and laughed again.

"She's got tew be taken daown a peg," he thought, and answered, unfeelingly, "I reckon you're mighty praoud of your little feet, ever since Phil Bently told you that they were like Cinderella's; but I'd say that a girl needn't get stuck up over having a small 'understanding.'"

"Huh. I guess you've forgotten that thoroughbreds always have smaller hoofs than cart horses, and . . ."

"Guess you've forgotten that a mule has the smallest of the lot, smarty," broke in her brother, triumphantly. "Anyhaow, it strikes me that Abe was mighty lucky to have had big ones. A .45 bullet, mushroomed from going through a door, would have just about smashed one your size tew smithereens. Naow you've got me laughing, too, but it's no joking matter. And tew think that it had tew happen just after both Donald and Philip had gone home, leaving us without a doctor! Of course Camille can take care of it as well as any nurse; but I've had tew send doawn to Fayville for old Doc. Thornsberry tew come up and dig aout the bullet . . . and the Lord knows that he's more butcher than surgeon."

At this remark Omie suddenly became serious and sympathetic again.

"Oh, dear, the poor man," she said, penitently.

"Who is he, Virge?"

"Good heavens, don't you know who he is? Why, he's a celebrity. He's Abe Blount, the Caounty's Demon Still Destroyer, leading lawyer, sheriff, and — most folks say — aour next State's Attorney!"

"Virgil Gayheart, he never is!" exclaimed Omie, protesting unbelief tinged with a suggestion of awe in

her tone. "You don't mean tew tell me that he's Sheriff Blount! Why, he can't be; he doesn't look a bit like a hero!"

It would seem that the girl had a very definite conception of how one of those difficult-to-define creatures — a hero — should look, even as you and I did, perhaps, at the age of seventeen, and she could not immediately credit the assertion that a man so ungainly of figure and plain of face as he who had come to their door at midnight, in trouble and seeking their aid, could be likewise one who had made a mark, even within their limited locality, for remarkable ability and almost romantic bravery. Was not that man made of the same common clay as the other mountaineers of her acquaintance and exactly like scores of others except for the fact that the hand of the potter seemed to have been notably careless in his fashioning?

Smiling a little, her brother demanded, "And just what should a hero look like, Miss Know-it-all?"

"Oh, I... I don't know, exactly. But not like him, anyhaow. Why, he's just plain 'maounting,' and as homely as a . . . a hedgehog."

"Maybe so. Just the same, I think he looks a lot like the greatest American in history — and one of the greatest heroes that ever lived," responded Virgil, promptly and with vigor.

"Not . . . you don't mean Abe Lincoln?"

"Yes, I do."

Omie was well acquainted with her brother's almost reverential admiration of the man who had been born in a mountain cabin not so very many miles away, and as rude as any within those hills; who—led by the hand of Destiny which had weighed him and not found him wanting—had risen to the most exalted position within the gift of his countrymen, to wear at last a

martyr's crown for the sake of the reunited nation which he had been God's chosen instrument in preserving. He had told her the story of their own Abe Lincoln when she was a small child and had later spoken of him, often. Only a short time previous he had, with glowing pride, read her part of an article written by a famous man in the field of English letters who had declared that their Lincoln was the outstanding figure of the Nineteenth Christian Century, classing his name with that of the Christ as one of the few truly great ones of human history. On that occasion Virgil, strangely moved for him, had gone further, saying that, although Lincoln's body had returned to the dust, his spirit still lived, guiding, inspiring, strengthening not only all true Americans, but men of humble birth throughout the habitable world. Recalling all this, the girl felt that it was almost sacrilege for him now to compare their commonplace guest to the dead President, even remotely.

She could not bring herself to express the thought, however, and merely answered, "Well, I don't think so . . . and looks don't mean anything, anyway." (Oh, Omie! Can you justify that paradoxical declaration in view of what you have just been saying about heroes?) "And I know that he isn't really a bit like him, except what he puts on."

"Puts on?" echoed her brother, in puzzled tones.

"Yes, puts on. I've heard that he's always trying tew imitate Lincoln. Nobody who's really big — inwardly, I mean — would be dewing that. I didn't believe it before, but I dew, naow."

Virgil regarded her in utter astonishment, she spoke so vehemently. He knew that she was a creature of strong and sudden likes and dislikes, who was likely to carry her partisanship to extremes; but, being unable to read

her mind, he could not, for the life of him, see any reason for her sudden hostility towards their wounded guest. He could not know that the girl had listened to tales of Abe Blount's legal ability, physical prowess and personal bravery — especially the last — until her youthful thoughts had invested him with all the attributes of a mythical hero, one young and handsome, who might some day come riding down the mountain pass, a Lochinvar, to bear her away with him. And now he had come: but, ah, how differently, shot through his ungainly foot while kicking in a door! The idol which her active imagination had set up, and which she had worshiped in secret, had fallen prostrate. Its feet were clay. Omie's tears were very close to the surface tears of chagrin, and of indignation against the man who had turned out to be so utterly different from the hero of her dreams. All of which was natural enough, and more deserving of pity than scornful amusement.

"Who says that he does?" demanded her brother.

"Oh, everybody." Omie was grossly exaggerating now; but did not care.

"Huh! What 'everybody' says generally doesn't mean a thing. And it's not true in this case, either; at least, I don't believe a word of it. I never saw him trying tew copy anybody. There's nothing strange abaout it if he has some of Abe Lincoln's characteristics, as well as looks—he comes from a good deal the same sort of stock and grew up under the same sort of conditions. Besides, supposing he did, what of it? I should think that it was a good thing tew have a high ideal and try tew live up tew it, even in little things."

"I don't care," retorted the girl, stubbornly. "I

just hate a copy-cat."

"Well, you're a good one tew talk, Omie Gay-

heart! You're trying tew imitate 'Smiles' McDonald,

every minute of the day."

"I'm not!" she flashed, knowing in her heart of hearts that she was not speaking the exact truth. "And, even if I did, it's not the same thing. He's a man, and ought tew stand on his own feet — they're certainly big enough!"

The conversation was back at its starting point.

"Well, for heaven's sake, I should think that he'd been dewing it!" Virgil was now thoroughly exasperated. "He isn't thirty-five, yet, and . . ."

"Thirty-five!" The intonation with which she repeated the words indicated, plainly enough, that in her estimation a man approaching forty was already hope-

lessly aged.

"Oh, shucks. Naow you're talking foolish... but it's what might be expected of a kid. I don't know what's got intew you, this morning; but, of course, if you don't want me tew talk abaout all the things Abe Blount has done, before he was thirty-five, why ..."

"Oh, I'm listening."

She spoke with an air of resignation; but, despite her perverse behavior she was suddenly—and inexplicably—afraid that she had gone too far, and that Virgil might change the subject. And she realized that she did not want that to happen, yet. Aged and homely he might be, and a shattered idol; still his name had once been able to inspire romantic imaginings in her heart, and her curiosity regarding him was not yet satisfied.

At that moment they were joined by Camille, the Belgian orphan whom Fate, capriciously inclined, had landed in that isolated part of America's Southern Highlands and wed to Virgil, the mountain man. Now

her soft voice, with its odd accent, demanded the cause of the heated discussion which had been going on outside of her hospital walls, and, when she had been told, she begged to hear more about her new patient, whose bedside she had just quitted. With her arm about Omie's girlish waist, and her dark hair close to the Anglo-Saxon's golden head, she drew her a few steps further away from the House of Health, so that their voice might not by any chance reach Abe Blount's ears; then said, quietly, "Alors, Virgil. Commence!"

CHAPTER III

A NARRATIVE

It is not improbable that Virgil, aroused by Omie's absurd and, to him, inexplicable assumption of hostility towards their guest, laid himself out to make his story of Abe Blount's life interesting and romantic. He actually knew only its barest outlines, and this by hearsay, but, if he called upon his imagination to fill them out and supply the local color, the incidents which he recounted were substantially correct, as the girl later learned. It is also true that, until Abe had come to claim their hospitality, in the middle of the night, his interest in his hero had been rather impersonal and transitory — a passing appreciation of the achievements which had made him locally famous. Virgil had previously met him only a few times and his acquaintance with him was purely casual. But now a personal, protective element had entered into his interest, and it had been suddenly intensified by his sister's contrariness. He felt that he was called upon to justify the man and his own judgment of him, and he meant to do it, if only for the sake of seeing Omie "crawl." And, like most Southerners, and men bred amid primitive surroundings, Virgil possessed a natural gift for storytelling. He enjoyed spinning a yarn, and, before his narrative was far advanced, he had become so interested in it, for its own sake, that he had subconsciously convinced himself that his protagonist was really the hero of a mountain epic in the making.

He began lightly, however, saying with a smile, "All right. 'Listen, my children, and you shall hear the

story of Abraham Blount's career'... and if it isn't interesting it will be the fault of the teller. He was born at a very early age, as they say, over where Bear's Mouth Creek runs intew 'Beaten,' as they called it then, in just abaout the smallest, meanest cabin in these hyar parts. And that means a lot. When he was a kid he simply ran wild, like a bear's cub himself, and folks say that, in spite of the size of him, naow, he was a little runt, and skinny, too. You see, his pappy died before Abe was born, shot in a feud, and I don't guess that he had anything much tew eat except 'hog and hominy,' and little enough of that, until Preacher Billy got hold of him."

"Ah, le pauvre petit!" exclaimed Camille, pityingly. She knew what it meant for children to be undersized from lack of nourishing food, and her heart ached as

she mentally pictured the fatherless boy.

"He attracted Billy's particular interest one day by fighting two of his sons, and licking them, too, although they were both bigger and older than he was, for calling him names."

"What names?" demanded Omie, unthinkingly disclosing the interest which she had been trying to conceal.

"Oh — what difference does it make? 'Chickenlegs,' maybe."

Virgil abruptly turned his eyes away from his sister's inquiring look, and forestalled further questioning

by hurrying on.

"Well, Billy let them finish the scrap, made his boys apologize, and then sort of adopted Abe intew the family — at least, he was always welcome to crawl in with the other children, there, if he wanted tew stay the night, and he could always find a square meal there. But he was still just as untamed as ever, and came and went abaout as he pleased. By the time he was eight or nine years old he was almost a dead shot. Game was a lot more plentiful, hyar-abaouts, than it is naow, and he'd help himself tew Billy's big rifle-gun, tote it for miles over the maountains, and fire it with the barrel rested across a log or the crotch of a limb. His bag was mostly small game like rabbits and 'coons, which he'd carry home sometimes tew Billy and more often tew his maw, but one day he got a full-grown bear that the men had been after for days. I can just see a picture of that skinny little devil, barefooted, his long black hair hanging over his eyes, aiming a rifle a good deal longer than himself across a fallen tree-trunk and plugging Mister Bruin so's his mammy could have b'ar steak for a week."

Virgil's eyes glowed with self-created excitement, and their light was for an instant reflected in his sister's.

"He was a heap more like Dan'el Boone than Abe Lincoln, in those days, and it was then that he got tew know every foot of the forests on these hills.

"There wasn't even an apology for a school hyarabaouts, and I reckon that Preacher Billy was the only man in these parts who could read at all. He was teaching his own kids their ABC's and wanted tew dew the same for Abe, but he preferred tew run wild, although he liked tew steal intew the cabin and lie on his belly before the fireplace, evenings, listening tew Billy's Bible stories, especially the more exciting Old Testament ones. Even then he had a lot of imagination, and I've heard Billy tell abaout one time when he suddenly rolled over, his eyes burning, and said, seriously, 'When I git tew grow up, Billy, I'm a-goin' tew be either like thet thar man uv war, David, or the man uv wisdom, Solomon, but I kain't make up my mind

which.' 'Well, why not be both?' Billy asked, laughing, and the kid jumped tew his feet, ripping aout a string of maountain cuss words which would have made an army mule-skinner blush, and swore that he would be both. You see, he was mighty sensitive tew ridicule, and had a red-hot temper in those days, although you wouldn't know it, naow.

"Abe got his start on the road tew education and fame when he was abaout ten — and at the same time the title of 'The Little Lawyer,' and it stuck tew him until he'd reached the six-foot mark with no signs of

stopping."

"Haow tall is he, naow?" asked Omie, irrelevantly.

"Oh, six-three or better, I reckon. Don't interrupt or you'll throw me off my stride. I was telling abaout haow he got his start. Well, Preacher Billy sent him, mule-back, daown to Fayville one day after some seed corn. His own boys were all planting, and Abe volunteered tew go since it was fun. It happened tew be the first day of the spring session at the Caounty Court, and natural curiosity led him with the rest of the idlers inside the ugly old brick Court House — you remember it, I reckon, Camille."

His wife nodded in assent, her eyes suddenly grown misty, for the memory of the tragic day when she had gone thither, seeking the man whom she loved and who stood accused of murder, never failed to bring the tears.

Virgil quietly laid his hand on hers, as it rested on the veranda railing, and continued, "There was a shooting case, growing aout of one of the old feuds, on trial, and the room was jammed with friends and relatives of both sides. Feelings were running pretty high; 'most every man had a gun aout in the entry or a revolver under his coat, and plenty of threats had been made that, if the jury had the bad judgment tew find the defendant guilty of murder, the coroner would have a few more jobs. Well, young Abe squirmed his way well up front and stood there taking it all in — a comical looking little cuss, according to Billy's tell, for he was still barefooted and had on a cast-off pair of his overalls which dragged on the floor although the legs were turned up as far's they'd go. And, of course, he never wore any hat and his hair stuck aout all ways for Sunday, and hung daown over his eyes.

"The State's attorney had already begun his opening address tew the jury, telling them what he expected tew prove, and, of course, making the murdered man aout as a law-abiding citizen of the community, as harmless as a dove, who had been shot daown in cold blood while standing in the doorway of his little peaceful cabin, with his happy family araound him. The defendant, he said, had fired at him from ambush, laying in wait behind a tree, after calling him aout intew the bright moonlight — the easiest sort of a defenseless

target.

"He'd been sailing along smoothly until he reached that point, when young Abe broke in, with his highpitched, boyish voice, saying, 'Hold on thar a minute, stranger. I reckon you're a-goin' tew have a moughty hard time proving all thet. First place, hit hain't nowise possible, fer Noey Tittle's shack sets daown in a sort uv a rocky holler under the north side uv a cliff whar the moonlight kain't reach, whatever. Then thar hain't no kivver whar a man could hide, near enough fer me tew shoot from — and I'm some shot. And, in the third place, hit warn't Judd Coombs what killed him in the first place, fer . . .'

"Well, I reckon that everybody was too plumb astonished tew interrupt him before, but just abaout then

things began tew happen. Can't you-all just see it? the old Judge taking his feet off the table and banging for silence with his gavel; the jurymen straightening up and, for a moment, anyway, forgetting tew spit tobacco juice in all directions; the crowd of spectators trying tew get a look at the cause of the interruption and starting to talk all at once; and Abe standing there, the coolest one in the room. You can bet that the lawyer for the defense grabbed him in a hurry, and in half a minute had enough evidence aout of him to win his case, hands daown. It seems that at the time of the murder Abe had been up on the mountain, two miles away from where it happened, amusing himself by secretly watching a man making moonshine and then getting dead drunk on it . . . and the man, he swore, was Judd Coombs, the defendant. This had been Coombs' own story, although, of course, Abe hadn't known it, and some time later the truth leaked aout. Tittle had himself come home drunk, started tew beat up his wife, and his own son had shot him, protecting his mother. Then the pair of them had got scared and cooked up the yarn of having seen Coombs making off intew the woods, with all the details."

"But," said Omie, after Camille had exclaimed over the incident, "but I don't see that Abe *did* anything, himself — it was just luck, his getting tew the Court Haouse at just that time, and being the only person who could prove that the man was innocent."

Virgil shrugged his shoulders — a gesture learned in France. "Luck, if you like — or Fate. But I'd say that the kid showed the stuff he was made of by speaking aout withaout being a mite afraid. And he showed a logical brain, too — anyway the defendant's lawyer thought so, and he was so tickled that he made it his business tew find aout all abaout Abe and insisted on

taking charge of his bringing-up. He even offered tew adopt him, but the boy wouldn't give up his mother."

"Who was his mother, Virge? Did she marry one

of the Blount family that we know?"

Virgil looked away again, and moved uneasily. "No," he said, shortly. "Never mind. It doesn't

make any difference who she was."

"But continue, Virge," broke in Camille, who was already developing the sixth sense by which a wife can somehow often tell that her mate is in difficulty and needs extricating.

"Oh, the deuce. I don't know why I started tew tell you two this yarn, anyway. Don't you think that I've got something more important tew dew than stand hyar and —"

"No. Breakfast isn't ready yet, and, besides, it's vacation time. We want to hear the rest, don't we,

Omie? "

The younger girl tossed her head, airily.

"I don't care, one way or the other," she affirmed, with assumed indifference.

"Well, I like that!" Virgil spoke half angrily; but his wife laid her hand upon his arm, and he relented entirely when she begged in her appealing way, "Oh, please, Virgil. Moi . . . I think it ees all mos' inter-

esting. And that the Mr. Abe is, too."

"Oh, all right. But I'm not going tew keep on trying tew make a story of it — just give you the aoutline, for there are yarns enough abaout his dewings tew fill a book. Maybe he'll tell you some of them, some day, but I don't guess so. He's sort of close-mouthed abaout himself. Well, the lawyer — I've forgotten his name, naow, if I ever heard it — had just come tew Fayville tew start in practice, and he finally succeeded in getting Abe's mother tew go daown there to keep haouse

for him, bringing the boy, of course. At first he had a fight on his hands tew get him tew go tew school; but, when he once *did* begin tew get book-learning — you know the story of what Uncle Bije Thornsberry said when he saw his first railroad train, Omie? "

The girl laughed, and Camille exclaimed, "Oh, I

don't know it. Tell me."

"You tell her: my tongue's getting tired," responded Virgil.

His sister complied.

"You know Uncle Bije? Well, up tew last year he had never seen a train, and one day his son Amos got him tew ride his little old mule daown tew Fayville, tew look at one. Sure enough, an engine and string of cars were standing on the track, just ready tew start, and Amos tried tew explain what was going tew happen. But Uncle Bije wouldn't listen - said that 'them thar tremenjous heavy wagons jest couldn't go, withaout nary a horse or mule tew pull them.' In a minute or two the engine began tew puff and the wheels began tew go 'raound. Bije watched it, mouth wide open and getting more excited every second as it started off daown the track, faster and faster. At last, when it was going at what seemed tew him like a terrible rate, it went aout of sight around a curve, and he grabbed Amos by the arm and yelled, 'Gosh A'mighty, boy, they hain't never goin' tew be able tew stop hit, naow! '"

"Well, Abe was a good deal like 'thet thar train,'" Virgil continued, after they had had their laugh over Omie's mimicry. "The lawyer couldn't have stopped him, if he had wanted tew; but I reckon he laid the right sort of tracks for the boy's mind tew run on and taught him tew appreciate good books. I don't guess there's a man or woman in the Caounty, including the

Settlement School teachers daown at Fayville, who has read half what he has, naow. He began tew change in other ways, too. For once in his life he began tew get enough tew eat and he grew fast, first shooting up over six feet, as thin as a beanpole, and then filling aout like he is naow. He was always as quick as a cat; naow he was as supple as an Indian and strong — well, I've heard some stories abaout haow far he can jump, haow hard he can hit, and his ability tew wrestle, that saound like fairy-tales, and yet they say are true. He still had a mighty hot temper, and at one time or another he licked every boy in Fayville."

"A bully!" interposed Omie, tossing her head again.

"You'd have wanted tew dew the same if — never mind. The funny thing was that every one he licked ended by being his sworn friend. Let's see, where was I? Oh, yes. After he got started, he went through the caounty 'grade school' like a hot knife through butter, and, before he'd struck seventeen, he had finished what passed for a high-school. I shouldn't wonder if those six years were the easiest and happiest Abe's ever had in his life, for, when they came tew an end, he had tew begin tew fight for himself all over again — and he's been fighting ever since."

"Why, what happen' then?" inquired Camille.

"That spring the lawyer died of some contagious disease or other, and Abe's mother caught it from nursing him day and night, and died, too."

"Oh!"

"Yes, that's the way things go. Abe's life was all adrift again — every tie had been cut, and he didn't even have any home in Fayville. People offered tew help him — give him jobs, but no! He heard the mountains calling him, I reckon, and headed for the old cabin where he had been born. Of course Preacher

Billy tried tew befriend him again, and give him some comfort aout of - of the Bible, but he didn't get anywhere just then. Abe wasn't much more than a boy, but he'd begun tew dew some thinking on his own hook. He'd been hit hard; his beliefs were adrift, too, and he hadn't faound anything that he could tie up tew. I reckon, though, that he got just what he most needed - a chance tew think and fight it aout with himself close tew nature, for he put in the whole summer just roaming through the woods, hunting and fishing just enough tew keep his stomach away from his backbone. But the thing that was more starved than his body was his brain. He was physically free, but his mind was beating against the bars.

"He had book-hunger — I know the feeling a little, but not as he must have had it. He'd caught glimpses of the Land of Knowledge, wanted tew see more and knew that education was the door aout intew it. There's something abaout being up in the hills that makes people 'see' things, and see 'em clearly, it seems tew me. Joan of Arc had her vision on a hillside, 'Smiles' had her's up here, and it was the same with Abe. He knew, somehaow, that he had a big battle ahead of him, and he decided that he'd got 'tew arm hisself with the sword and buckler uv knowledge' - as Billy says. He made up his mind tew go to college. But haow tew get tew go there was another question."

Virgil halted his narrative and remarked in an agonized tone, "And if I don't 'get tew go' tew breakfast mighty soon this fool yarn won't ever be finished, because the story-teller will have starved tew death."

Indeed, all three of them had been up since shortly after midnight; it being vacation time at Smiling Pass, the morning meal was not on schedule, and all of them were beginning to feel faint for the lack of food.

"I'm simply famished, too," cried Omie. "If mother doesn't . . ."

But mother had already appeared in the doorway of the House of Hunger, with the big dinner bell in her toil-worn hand.

CHAPTER IV

. . . WHICH IS CONTINUED

"Don't tell any more 'til I come back," commanded Camille, as she—always the ministering nurse—started back towards the House of Health, carrying a laden breakfast tray for her patient; a bowl of oatmeal, three fried eggs, a plate of corn bread, black coffee and a glass of milk. Apparently she had no fear of fever in his case.

"You don't need tew worry. I've got something better tew dew," was Virgil's answer; and, with his spoon poised above his bowl of cereal, he paused, nodded at his sister, and remarked quietly, "You ask the blessing, Omie."

At Smiling Pass no meal was begun until one of the pupils, called on by name, had repeated the little verse which "Smiles" had taught her little Belgian charge in the hospital in France, and Camille had in turn brought to her new mountain home. To-day the long, plain tables were innocent of the usual horde of hungry children, and only one small side-table was set for the members of the family, so it seemed to Omie that Virgil was not altogether disingenuous in calling on her — it savored a little of discipline.

She flushed a little rebelliously, but nevertheless bowed her sunny head and began at once, "For all the blessings of this day: for food and rest, for work and play, we give Thee thanks, O God of Light. Help us tew serve aour fellow men — in the name of Christ, aour Lord. Amen."

"Abe Blount comes pretty near tew 'serving his fel-

low men,' Omie," remarked her brother, as he dipped his spoon into the oatmeal. "Think it over."

When Camille returned to the dining-room she was still smiling, and in explanation said, "Mr. Abe Blount ees so funny he made me laugh at heem. I just ask' heem if hees foot hurt veree bad and he said, 'No, the pain ees not sharp but eet ees rather large. I suppose that thees was meant as a lesson for me to queet kicking. The nex' time I have to break in a door I shall use my head . . . at leas' figuratively.' I was surprise,' for he talked like a man from the city — like Donald or Pheelip — and las' night eet was so different you know."

Omie's eyes opened wider, and she was about to speak when Camille continued, "And then he ask' eef I had effer heard the story of how the negroes came to have such beeg, flat feet, and when I told heem 'no,' he said, 'Well, one day Ham, the first of the black race, was standing on a rock under a great tall cocoanut tree. The nuts were many times beeger than they are now, and one of them fell down and heet heem on hees nut. The bump didn't even make hees head ache, but eet drove hees feet down on the rock so hard that eet flattened them out to two times the size they had been — as you can see by looking at any of hees descendants.' Then he said that he gueesed some one must have heet heem on the head when he was jus' begeening to walk."

"Reckon that perhaps you'll like him better, naow that you know he agrees with you abaout his feet,

Omie," laughed her brother.

The girl merely sniffed and asked her sister-in-law the postponed question.

"Did he really talk like that? I heard him talking

with the other men, last night, and thought that he was just an uneducated maountaineer, for he was using double negatives, and saying 'hit' and 'hain't' exactly like the rest of them. That's one reason why I just couldn't believe it, when you told me that he was Sheriff Blount, Virge."

Omie was not a little proud of her own newly acquired ability to keep her speech free of the Anglo-Saxonisms which had persisted from Colonial days down to the

present, within those isolated mountain regions.

"Ho! He can talk a sight better English than we can, when he wants tew; but I reckon that he doesn't want folks up in these hills tew get the idea that he thinks he's any better than they are, and is putting on airs with his 'furren' language."

"Well, anyway that proves what I said. He isn't natural—it's just as much pretending as—as anything. You insist on aour talking pure English,

and —"

Virgil was becoming exasperated again, and answered almost sharply, "That's an entirely different thing. We've set aout tew help educate aour own kind, and of course we've got tew be an example tew them all the time, and as well as we can. If we didn't live and behave and talk better than they dew, they'd have a right tew say, 'Why don't you practice what you preach — or teach — and what good'll hit dew us tew try tew git book-larnin'?' But everybody knows that Abe's as well-educated as most city-bred college men and a whole lot brainier than the average, and they're pleased by having him continue so simple and 'homely.' Besides, he's mixed up in politics naow, and his success hyar is largely dependent upon his making folks feel that he's one of themselves and not a superior being - you ought tew know haow praoud and sensitive we maountaineers are! And it isn't 'pretending', as you call it, with him. It's natural for him tew adjust himself tew any condition, and that he can be simple with the simple proves that he's big and broadminded."

Omie did not reply, but her tightly pursed lips indicated that she still clung to her opinions. Her brother was becoming thoroughly weary of the useless argument — the whole subject, for that matter — and he would have dropped it there if Camille had not sought to become pacifier by begging him to continue his account of their patient's career.

"You left eet at a mos' interesting place," she reminded him.

Virgil made a pretense of refusing to continue — at least so long as Omie should be present, "since it could be of no interest to her"—but presently he yielded, pushed back his chair, and picked up the thread of his story.

"Well, I said that Abe decided tew go tew college, and naturally he set his mind on Berea . . . it's aour home college, and besides the tuition was free. But he knew he'd have tew have some money tew pay for certain incidental expenses — something like twenty-five dollars, I think it was — and enough tew pay his board until he could begin tew earn his way. Fifteen years ago money was scarcer'n hen's teeth in these maountains, for we weren't boot-legging moonshine daown tew the taowns at five dollars a quart in those days. It was mostly barter, hyar, and he needed cash. So he set aout for a place where he could earn it quickest, even though it meant sweating for it."

"Where was that?" his wife asked.

"In a coal mine. The nearest was then more than fifty miles away, and he hoofed the whole distance

over the hard maountain trails, all by his lonely, living on what game he could shoot. There were cabins where he could have bunked, nights, if he'd wanted tew; but he told Billy afterwards that he slept under the stars so that his dreams would have more free space tew sail in — and his legs more space tew stretch. Abe had made up his mind tew train himself tew to be a 'Solomon'; but he was naturally a dreamer, like 'David'; the poet, as well as the warrior. Well, he finally reached the mine, and got him a job, first as mule boy, later with a pick. I don't know what the pay was, except that it was darned little; but he lived on a lot less, spent what he had tew for books, and candles tew study them by, and saved the rest.

"He was still little more than a boy, but a strapper by this time — and he looked older than his age, just as he does naow. And, like every new member of a crew of tough coal miners, he had tew fight for the privilege of being left alone. I've heard one story of a scrap he had with the mine bully who'd been picking on 'leetle Tomasso' - Dago Lemos, the United Miners' star agitator, he is naow. I reckon I won't go

intew details, but it must have been a peach!

"Finally Abe had saved up money enough so that he thought he could scrape by and make his start on the road tew higher education. And then some skunk stole

every red cent of it! "

Camille broke in with a pitying, "Ah, quel dommage!" reverting to her native tongue, as she generally did when strongly moved.

"C'est ça. It must have been a knock-daown, but it proved that Abe didn't know the meaning of the word 'quit.' You remember the verses that 'Smiles' used tew repeat to Donald, sometimes, 'Under the bludgeonings of Fate . . .?' Abe simply began all over again, and, by working double time, pulled daown just enough tew get him intew Berea for the fall term. So he hit the old Dan'el Boone trail westward over the maountains for the edge of the Blue Grass country and his goal. Maybe working in a coal mine, like that, doesn't seem particularly heroic or romantic, Omie; but I reckon that most people would say it was in Abe's case. It isn't what you dew that caounts in character-making: motives and conditions are the big percentage, as 'Smiles' showed when she insisted on aour marking the daily report cards fifty percent for initiative and endeavor. Remember?

"I don't know much abaout Abe's four years at Berea; but I've heard that he left college with the best record that's ever been made there. There are a few yarns about him, though. After a while he learned tew be a mighty good blacksmith, and earned his way paounding iron; but, at the start, he picked up the necessary coin sawing and splitting wood — fifty cents a cord for sawing and twenty for splitting, paying for the tools you break aout of your own pocket. Being Abe, he made a game of it; got up contests and beat the others all hollow at it. And — oh, yes. He got a place in the college band for which the instruments were loaned, and a fellow, who was at Berea at the same time, once told me that the plumb funniest sight he'd ever seen was Abe Blount sitting 'way daown on his spine, his legs half way across the room, and the sleeve of his home-spun coat half way up tew the elbow, as he reached the slide of his trombone aout after a particularly low note, all the while thumping aout the time on the floor with that size fourteen foot of his."

Even Omie's eyes twinkled a little over the description, and Camille laughed merrily.

"Well, the President of the college finally got right

interested in him — naturally — and, when he learned that the lanky, queer-looking young man from Bear's Mouth Creek had his mind set on being a lawyer, he gave him a letter of introduction tew a friend of his daown in Culverton City. He's one of aour Supreme Court Judges, naow, but then he was only a trial justice and practicing law there. He took Abe intew his office tew dew odd jobs and read law at the same time. He didn't get any wages, and had tew go some tew keep body and soul together, clerking nights in a freight office and writing local news items for a newspaper; but the necessity of getting tew a point where he could earn a real living combined with his ambition tew succeed, and he got himself admitted tew the bar in pretty near record time."

"Bien fait!" cried Virgil's wife, softly clapping her hands. "Voilà, he had labored with deeligence and fought with bravery. Now he arrive' at hees - what you call eet? Goal?"

"That's right. Saounds like a story in a Fourth Reader, doesn't it, Omie? Only, like most goals, Abe's turned aout tew be a 'fleeting' one. Life's a lot like a journey over these maountains — you reach one peak, and there's another beyond it tew be climbed, every time. Some folks are like aour own ancesters who settled these parts; they get discouraged, stick in one of the narrow passes and 'let the rest of the world go by.' But the Dan'el Boones keep on climbing, everlastingly, over the Blue Ridges, the Smoky Maountains and the Cumberlands of life, always following the path of the sun. And Abe's that kind.

"He was a 'full-pledged' lawyer — as Billy put it — naow, but for a couple of years he didn't have any practice tew amaount tew anything. His instructor had been appointed tew the Circuit bench, so Abe opened a small office of his own, which soon became pretty well craowded, especially nights; but not with clients. He had plenty of friends, and it was a popular meeting place for politicians and others who got the habit of dropping in there tew listen to Abe spin yarns, talk and smoke. You know what the old Indian said: 'Injun heap big smoker. Smoking great help tew laziness.'"

"Well, Abe wasn't lazy, anyway, and luckily for him he wasn't praoud, either. He kept right on with his clerking, nights, acting as reporter and dewing odd jobs — when he wasn't reading law and everything else he could lay his hands on — even after clients began tew come. It was a case of 'have tew,' I reckon; for at the start they were mostly charity cases. I've heard that he always charged a fee for the sake of his client's self-respect; but that sometimes it wasn't more'n fifty cents, and he paid the costs aout of his own pocket, plenty of times. One famous case of his — well, never mind that. I keep thinking of new stories abaout him.

"At the same time he joined up with the local State militia company; but he stood aout from the ranks in more ways than one, and, by the spring of Seventeen, he'd got tew be a Lieutenant and a darned good officer. By that time his practice had grown tew be quite a sizable one, too; people laughed at his awkwardness, but they liked him just the same, and were growing tew realize that he knew more real law than any man in these parts — some say than any man in the whole State. He had a way of getting juries on his side, and he was plumb honest.

"Well, then we went intew the War. Abe threw up

his practice and commission in the militia and enlisted in the regulars as a private — the first man in the Caounty tew dew it."

"Oh, that was good!" Camille's soft eyes flashed

with the old war-time passion.

"You bet it was good," he answered. "You see, he'd been studying and thinking abaout world conditions; his mind was already made up as tew where aour duty, and his, lay, and he wasn't willing tew wait even until his company should be mustered intew Federal Service. So he gave up his commission tew shoulder a gun again, in order tew get 'over there' as soon as possible — and he never got tew go at all!"

"But why didn't he, Virge?"

"Fate played him what looked like a dirty trick. It beats the dickens haow things work aout in this world. There I was, greener'n grass in soldiering and a draft-dodger. Yet they shipped me tew France and I come home with a medal pinned on my chest — just by luck. And there was Abe Blount, a trained soldier, crazy tew get intew the scrap, and they never let him aoutside his own State. Just the same he really did ten — yes, a hundred — times more towards helping win the war than I, if that's any satisfaction. I'll bet he wouldn't admit that he did, though. It wasn't long before his C. O. spotted him, not only as an old soldier, but as a man who knew and could handle men especially maountaineers. They jumped him right ahead intew a commission again, but kept him first in the recruiting and then in the training service. There was no hero-stuff abaout it - just hard, unappreciated, routine work — but he was a hero, just the same. He saw that it had got tew be done, that he was fitted tew dew it, and that it was 'his job.' I reckon he might have worked it so's tew be sent over seas, but that isn't the Abe Blount way — he's too conscientious and patriotic, sometimes for his own good, for he took this 'sheriff job' for the same reasons. Oh, well. His time's coming. You know what one of the old poets said, 'Peace hath its victories no less renowned than war.' Life's a battlefield, when you come right daown tew it.

"When he was mustered aout of service he went back tew practicing law again, and cases began tew come in right smart. Besides, he got himself appointed as special State's Attorney tew help prosecute moonshine cases in the Circuit Court daown at Fayville, and some of his experiences were what decided him tew give up a good practice and run for sheriff."

"Why?" demanded Omie, forgetting her pose for the moment.

"He made up his mind that the new prohibition law was being bust wide open in these maountains, and that the office of sheriff was being filled in a halfhearted manner. There were mighty few raids being pulled, and seldom evidence or witnesses enough tew get convictions on. Sheriff Poole didn't believe in the Eighteenth Amendment; said so, and wouldn't proceed against breakers of the law unless he was plumb forced tew. The result was that the number of moonshiners was growing every day, and they were getting away with murder — that's literal, for a lot of shooting cases were growing aout of the business. wasn't keen for the law, as it stands; but he recognized that it was the law, and believed that it should be lived up tew, and enforced, strictly. 'Let's give it a fair trial,' he said. 'It's the people's law, and it's for them tew decide whether or not they want it changed if they don't like it - not for the individual tew say that he won't obey it just because he doesn't like it, personally.'

"I don't yet see haow he succeeded in getting himself elected on such a platform, in this Caounty, but he did. Where there's only one real political party, Personality caounts more than Platforms, I reckon. Anyhaow, Abe won aout in spite of having the unpopular side of that issue, which was the only one, for most everybody liked him. And of course nobody thought that he really would start in tew clean up these maountains the way he has, even though he'd given them fair warning. If they had — well, I don't guess that he'd be aour guest, naow. But what he did was typical of him. It meant a big sacrifice on his part; but it was another case of a disagreeable job which had got tew be done, and he figured that he was the one tew dew it; he's a natural-born public servant, always ready tew serve his fellow men. And you-all know what he has done, and the reputation he's made in the last two years, as well as I dew.

"There, that's the whole darned story, and I hope your curiosity's satisfied, for I'm plumb talked-aout.

As for you, Omie -"

"Oh, I didn't ask you to tell it—although, of course, I was glad tew hear it, and you made it most interesting. He really is even more wonderful than I thought."

Virgil could take no exception to her words, but the tone in which they were spoken had a suggestion of sarcasm which brought a sharp retort to his lips.

But Camille intervened again, saying hastily: "Yes. And we mus' do our best to make heem get well, queekly. I know that you'll want to help, Omie dear. And, since I took in hees breakfas', won't you please go and get the dishes, if he ees finis' with them?"

CHAPTER V

SURPRISES

At the door of the hospital Omie paused, her attention for the moment caught by the clear call of a whippoorwill, somewhere among the bushes on the "yon" side of the creek. She instantly pursed her sensitive lips and imitated the flute-like note so accurately that a human ear certainly would have been deceived, and the hidden bird either was, or else mockingly entered into a game of call and answer.

Standing thus, the girl let her gaze wander over the colorful picture spread before her, raising it from the silvery glinting waters of the creek, which flowed through the foreground just below, to her own home beyond them — the usual simple double cabin built of unhewn, lichen-covered logs, but now modernized by several shining windows, an addition, and a commodious porch which spring had converted into a bower of pink and crimson rambler roses; then on and up the steep side of the mountain, which began at their very back door, to terminate with its summit in sharp relief against the cloudless, cerulean sky high above her.

For a moment she stood there, her hand resting lightly on the lintel, her shapely tanned arm bare above the elbow and an aureole of golden light about her head, as the morning sunshine flooded through her loosened hair — wholly unconscious of the fact that the door was wide open behind her and that she had moved into full view of the man who lay upon a hospital cot within the house. The delectable picture of budding womanhood was framed against the glowing back-

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ground, and Abe Blount took it in with keen appreciation, almost holding his breath for fear of breaking the spell. Then Omie turned, suddenly, caught his frank and friendly gaze bent upon her, and the warm color mounted to her temples as swiftly as though she had been surprised in some unmaidenly act. She was, indeed, both embarrassed and angry.

The man's deep-set gray eyes held the suggestion of a smile, and immediately his lips smiled as well. An entirely new expression was imparted to the whole plain, somber countenance, and Omie was conscious of the fact that her heart gave a still quicker throb. Her eyes grew misty for an instant and she caught her breath with an almost audible gasp. Her feelings were inexplicable. Of course she was angry—at herself and at him as well; but it was not that, altogether. For one thing, he wasn't "just plain maountain" as she had conceived him to be; nor yet, at the moment, ugly at all. He was just—just different!

Her surprise and confusion were so complete that, when she attempted to speak, all that she could succeed in doing was to stammer out, "I — I'm Omie."

From the bed came a deep, humorous and rather pleasant drawl. "Naow, that's funny. I was just saying tew myself, 'Abe Blount, if that young lady's name isn't *Omie* it ought tew be."

"Why—why?" asked the girl, astonishment and curiosity conquering every other feeling.

"Why? Oh, just because it seems tew fit you — or you tew fit it. It's neither too short nor too long; it's peculiarly 'maountain'; yet it's not a bit ordinary; it's both sweet and merry; and finally it suggests the unexpected — as though one might frequently have tew say, 'Oh me, Oh my, Omie.'"

Omie laughed, in spite of herself, the whole thing

was so surprising and absurd. Ought she to feel complimented, or not? Almost without conscious volition she found herself answering, "But 'what's in a name?'" and his eyes twinkled still more humorously as he retorted, "Everything! The names of all Bill Shakespeare's characters are perfect fits, for instance."

"Well, haow abaout yours?" she demanded.

"Made tew order. 'Abraham' is long and sort of loose-jointed, while 'Abe' is country — or maountain-

fied, homely as a hedgehog --"

Omie was startled, and again the color flooded her cheeks. Could he have overheard what she had said or was this merely coincidence? This time, however, her distress sharpened her wit, and she hastily capped his unfinished sentence with the words:

"But honest."

"Let's hope so. One man succeeded in making the two words synonymous, and it is up tew the rest of us tew ape honest Abe, at least in that respect, so far as we can," he replied with evident appreciation. "Speaking of names; when I was a boy this creek was called 'Beaten' and the folks hyar-abaout acted the same. Naow they tell me that you-all have changed the name tew 'Smiling Pass' and, from what I've seen already, I'd say that the adage abaout giving a dog a bad name works the other way araound, too. The spot seems tew be living up tew its new, good name, right smart—it's sure improved a-plenty since the days when I was seven or eight years old and used tew wander up to Bill Cress's still and get filled up with moonshine."

"Did Bill used tew give it tew you? The villain."

Omie was indignant.

"Well, I hadn't any money, and I'll admit that even then I was too honest tew steal. 'Bad Bill' wasn't all bad; he liked his fun, although getting a kid full of corn whiskey showed a rather crude sense of humor, I suppose. They tell me that he's reformed, naow,

along with the locality."

"Yes. 'Smiles' did it - Mrs. McDonald, who faounded this school, you know. And she named the place 'Smiling Pass.' At least, she and Camille did, between them. Camille is the one who dressed your wound last night. She's Virgil's wife, and I'm his sister."

- "The mystery is solved! I've been wondering just where that sweet and skillful little 'furriner' fitted intew the scheme."
- "Only she isn't a 'furriner,' naow. She's one of us," Omie declared decisively.
- "Good for us, then. But, in settling one point, you've araoused my curiosity abaout a lot of other things, and I hope you'll satisfy it. An invalid must be humored, you know."

Abe smiled again, and so did the girl.

"Well, I will, if I can."

"I reckon you can if you will. I've heard a lot of mighty interesting things abaout this school, hospital and citizenship training project of yours, while I've been away from home, and I'd sure love tew hear the whole story. Please sit daown and --"

"Oh, you'd better let Virgil tell you, sometime. He's a lot better at telling stories than I am."

The twinkle in the man's humorous eyes increased again as he responded, "Well, I know something of Virgil's reputation as a spinner of yarns — I've read the Iliad, and —" The puzzled expression on Omie's face caused him to break off and apologize. "That was a joke and a poor one. I was speaking of the Latin poet. Your Virgil may be just as skillful in weaving romances, but I'll be satisfied with just the facts from you — that is, if you're not too busy."

"N-no, I guess not. This is vacation — we have two weeks in the spring at planting time, but the school keeps up all the rest of the year. We've got tew make up abaout a hundred years of lost time, hyar, you see."

Thus launched upon a subject in which she was bound up, heart and soul, Omie told the story of Smiling Pass, simply and without particular sequence, but with a fresh enthusiasm which made it interesting and appealing. Her listener was sufficiently entertained to urge her on with questions and comments until he had drawn from her almost the whole romantic history of "Smiles"—the adopted child of their mountains—her experiences in the outside world which lay, like another country, beyond the narrow confines of their encircling hills, and of the new settlement which she and her invalid physician-husband had founded on "Beaten," "tew bring help tew them as kain't help theirselves"—as Humpty Hite had expressed it.

Before she had progressed far in her recital Omie had unthinkingly taken a seat on the edge of the hospital cot, and, as her brother chanced to pass by the open window, and glanced into the room, he saw her there, talking fast, her color coming and going and the light of excitement in her eyes as she described the night when their newly built home had been attacked and shot up by drunken mountaineers.

"Whee-ew," he whistled under his breath, as he hastily moved away on silent feet, the look of astonishment on his countenance giving place to one of deep amusement. As soon as he was out of ear-shot he chuckled and said to himself, "Well, I'll be darned!"

When Omie had ended her story, somewhat out of breath and suddenly embarrassed - for, after all, she scarcely knew the man, and he was a famous personage, in spite of being so apparently commonplace and pleasant — Abe remarked, "Why, that's great! I didn't know that you-all were planning - no, were dewing — such a big thing for us maountain people. It's — inspirational, and I dew believe that you've hit on the real solution of aour educational problem hyar. I've been too busy tew give it as much thought as I should, but I know it's a mighty difficult one - folks aout in the rest of the United States couldn't grasp it at all, unless they had lived hyar the way your 'Smiles' has. The trouble is that people don't miss what they've never had and don't know anything abaout - whether its champagne or education. And, under those circumstances, supplying it isn't enough, by half. You can't make a mule drink merely by bringing him a bucket of water; but, if you can help him tew work up a thirst, he'll go tew it, fast enough. I can see that you-all are making education interesting - why, I believe I'd like tew come tew school hyar, myself."

Omie was surprised to find herself saying, eagerly, "Oh, I wish you would. Of course I don't mean as a pupil," she laughed, "but as one of our teachers in the Citizenship course. I know that you could teach us what it means tew be a true American citizen, and what the privileges and obligations of one are."

"Wouldn't I love tew, though! Perhaps I can, someday. It wouldn't be a plumb bad idea tew give the kids some notion of their Country's laws, while they're young; and why we ought tew be obedient and loyal tew them. Then when they grow up -. Most of us seem tew think Law tries tew make slaves of people, instead of which men's greed and passions are the real slave-makers. The law merely curbs them, and the best sort of freedom is faound within, rather than aoutside, it."

"Of course. We're trying tew teach something like that, naow, and it would be wonderful tew have a great lawyer, like you, tew explain it. It seems tew me that education and law sort of go together in bringing civilization."

"Good for you, Omie. They should, and dew, if the laws are righteous ones and the education is real—naow-adays such a lot of it seems tew be just makebelieve."

"Oh, please dew it! The children will all be back before you are well enough tew leave, I reckon."

"I'm not so sure abaout that. An 'honest' man puts business before pleasure, you know, and there's so much work waiting for me tew dew that I've got tew get well in a hurry."

There was real regret in the girl's voice as she answered, "Yes, I know you're awfully busy being sheriff. And you're going tew run for State's Attorney, too, and—"

"'Naow, I declare that's too bad. You've been listening at doors — and behind trees — and daown chimneys — or you wouldn't have known that! ""

Omie did not see the quizzical smile on his lips, and there was a note of such real aggrievement in his voice that — coupled with the astonishing nature of the remark itself — it caused her to jump up from the bed in surprise. What had she said that could possibly have caused him offense?

Her expression was one of such ludicrous bewilderment that Abe laughed outright.

"That was another joke," he said. "I was just quoting from 'Alice Through the Looking-glass.'

Those were Humpty Dumpty's words when he discovered that Alice already knew his secret."

The girl gave an uncertain laugh, but her amazement was increased and showed forth in her voice as she repeated, "'Alice Through the Looking-glass'? Why

- why, that's a child's book, isn't it?"

"A book for children of all ages, yes. If you've never read it, I certainly advise you tew. It's plumb full of wise nonsense that I haven't yet got tew old tew enjoy - and I hope I never shall." He dropped his voice to a tone of confidences, and continued, "You see, I have an idea that the country of Boy-and-Girlhood is a wonderful place tew which tew go and rest up a bit, naow and then, when your brain gets sort of footsore with traveling over the rough spots of Grown-up Land; and books like 'Alice' are like blazed trees on the back trail. Sometimes I 'git plumb skeered' that I'll forget the way there before I'm old enough tew get in again through the unattractive door called Second Childhood. I'd sure hate tew dew that, and I'm always on the look-aout for good guides - that's one of the reasons why I'm aiming tew be a friend of yours, if you'll let me. The moment I laid eyes on you, last night, with your hair in a pigtail daown your back, I said tew myself, 'Abe, old fellow, there's a little woman - whose name ought tew be Omie, if it isn't - that hasn't got so far away from Boy-and-Girlhood land that she can't find her way back, with her eyes shut. And maybe she'll let you go along, naow and then."

The girl remained standing, nonplused, her regard fixed with naïve amazement on the heavy-featured giant whose lanky frame was stretched on the cot bed, leaving very little of it to spare. Her imagination had played about him many times, but its wildest flight had certainly fallen short, and far short, of the reality.

What strange sort of a man was he, indeed? Could he, who had just uttered such incredible, nonsensical words in a tone of voice which was almost beseeching really be the lawyer whose ability was held in such high respect; the Sheriff who had come to be regarded as the moonshiners' Nemesis, feared by them as no other was feared; the man whom her brother had lately described in such glowing terms as a fearless fighter — a man of action and few words? Omie's limited experience had produced nothing by which she could gauge him. Moreover, her thoughts were now in a turmoil, for within the space of two short hours one creature of her imagination — the idol which she had made and worshiped - had been shattered, and the distorted, ugly image which she had willfully built up out of the fragments of the old had been destroyed just as suddenly, just as completely. The girl had honestly felt that nothing could possibly make her like this real Abe Blount, who was so utterly different from her mythical hero of the name. It was a childish and unreasonable feeling, but even Virgil's apologia of him had failed to shake it. She had gone to the room where the man lay, at Camille's request, from a sense of duty and unwillingly. Then, the miracle of personality! After less than half an hour's conversation with him, during which she had done most of the talking, she had felt not only completely at ease in his presence, but almost as though she had known him always. And she had unreservedly given him her liking!

Now she was experiencing another revulsion, which left her completely bewildered. She was angry again. He had intimated that he regarded her as merely a child with whom he might play, and she suspected that he was still making jokes at her expense — yet at the same time she knew that she had been a little thrilled by his

confidences and that she had, momentarily, been filled with an indefinably pleasurable sensation by the very suggestion which now seemed hateful. Omie could not understand her own feelings, and it made her correspondingly uneasy. Back in her subconscious mind there lingered a little of the primitive mountaineer's superstition. She had heard hypnotism discussed; and, although her quick brain had grasped Donald's explanation of it, her heart had protested that it was a stealing of people's souls — some of her neighbors even yet refused to submit to anesthesia, lest the surgeon rob them of their souls while they were unconscious. Now the thought flashed through her mind, "I wonder if he could have hypnotized me? He has such strange, deep eyes." She dismissed the idea as soon as it was formed, but her uneasiness persisted. She wanted to run away, yet could not make up her mind to do so. She knew that she would be angry with herself if she did. She would not show that she was afraid, nor act so discourteously. After all, there wasn't a thing to be afraid of. He might be queer, but he was certainly trying to be friendly; there was a whimsical smile in his eyes, although she noticed that now his mouth looked almost pathetically tired.

All of these conflicting sensations succeeded one another so rapidly that there was hardly a pause before she managed to stammer out an answer.

"Why — why — I don't guess that I know just what you mean, but - Of course I want tew help you -

help you get well, Mr. Blount - "

"'Mr. Blount! Well, I like that! Aren't I just as much 'maounting' as you, Miss Gayheart? My name's 'Abe,' and I insist upon my inalienable right tew be called that. We're going tew be friends, aren't we? "

This time his voice sounded so stern and serious that Omie drew a step nearer to the verge of panic. She knew it, and her resentment towards him, and anger at her own foolishness, mounted when she heard herself answer, as though it were another speaking, "Why—why I guess so, sir."

"Sir!" This from Omie Gayheart, who had never so much as thought of "Siring" any one before in all her life; that mischievous, free young spirit who had

never shown outward respect for any man.

It seemed that Abe Blount divined something of what was happening in her brain, for he gave an apologetic and rather rueful laugh, as he said, "I reckon you must think that I'm a queer sort of fellow. Well, I've often thought so, myself. And lying still with not a thing tew dew makes me feel as though I were on a vacation, and I don't want tew be serious. There's another thing; I don't guess I know haow to talk tew women. I've spent most of my life with men, and sort of got intew the habit of saying just what pops intew my head — and my friends have learned tew make allowances for me. Tew tell the truth, I'm kind of afraid of 'em - girls, I mean - too, but that's a secret which I'm trusting you tew keep. It would never dew tew let it get aout, naow that women have the vote, you know."

Omie's mind performed another complete revolution. Wonder of wonders, he confessed to being afraid of her! On the instant, all of her self-possession flooded back, and with it came a vague determination to make him pay, sometime, for the unpleasant sensations which he had, unwittingly, caused her. Her knowing that they were the result of her own foolishness made no difference.

She gave a merry laugh, and answered, "Oh, you're

not queer, but you sure are funny. And you needn't expect me tew believe for a minute that a man who isn't afraid of moonshiners and murderers is afraid of a maid. It'll be fun tew play 'boy-and-girl' with the famous Abe Blount, sometime - something tew tell my grandchildren abaout, if I ever have any; but naow I've got tew go. Camille's waiting for me tew bring back your breakfast dishes. Is there anything that vou'd like — Abe? "

"Why, no. I don't guess so. Oh, yes there are three things; but there's no hurry abaout them. For one, I'd like a pitcher of your spring water - I should think that I'd drunk all the licker that I 'looked upon,' last night. For another, my soul thirsteth for knowledge, and, when you told me about what a paowerful fine library you had here . . ."

"It's the largest in the Caounty," the girl broke in, proudly. "We've got more than seven thousand books, sent in by aour friends all over the United States — I catalogued most of them, myself although, of course, a good many of them are loaned aout tew other schools and settlements."

"That's fine. Books, like blood, should always be kept in circulation. Well, maybe you can spare me a few — especially Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,' and the two 'Alice' books. I'd love tew read the latter tew you, sometime, if you'll let me."

"Of course I will. Well, that's two things. 'thirdly,' as Preacher Billy says?"

"Thirdly, since Mahomet can't go tew the maountain, at present, he'd plumb love tew have some of it come tew him. I've been lying hyar wishing I were aout under that Redbush tree there, looking up at the blue sky —"

"I can't bring you any of the sky, this morning, but you shall have some of the flowers, right smart," cried the girl, before she stopped to think what odd requests these were from such a man. But, when the thought did come to her, the former feeling of unreality swept back and she almost ran from the building. The soiled breakfast dishes were left on the chair by his bed-side, wholly forgotten.

CHAPTER VI

MORE UNEXPECTED GUESTS

It was noon. Dr. Thornsberry had come, performed his task, and now departed, astride his plodding, motheaten mule, on his return journey to Fayville over the tortuous, twelve mile creek road which spelled at least four hours of riding, so rough it was, so full of deep ruts and big and little bowlders, except for the few hundred yards at Smiling Pass. *There* the boys of the Citizenship Club had captured and tamed it and it ran flat and firmly built; alike an example and a challenge to the County.

Virgil and Camille had stepped outside the little hospital to discuss the operation, and had there been joined by Omie — strangely silent, for her. Gunshot wounds were no great novelty in those mountains. Not a few victims of them had been treated in "Smiles'" House of Health, and left the girl unmoved; but now her vivid imagination had been aroused and at work. Springs of pity were welling up in her heart.

"Alors," Camille was saying, "eet was not deeficult to see that he had been a soldier. All the time he was making the jokes, and he did not once—how you say eet?—'fleench'?"

"Then you didn't give him ether?" inquired the younger woman, unable wholly to check the tremulous note in her voice.

"Not so's you'd notice it!" Virgil answered. "Camille suggested it — I reckon she wanted tew show off a bit before old Thornsberry — but Abe hooted at the idea. Said he wasn't going tew take any chances

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of having the doc amputate his foot, while he was unconscious, tew get the bones tew sell tew some museum as the pedal extremity of some prehistoric giant."

"Did he — did the doctor have tew cut very deep

tew get aout the bullet?"

"'Cut!' I call it hacking—I could have done a better job, myself. It made me plumb sick tew think that Don McDonald wasn't hyar. You should have heard old Thornsberry instructing Camille haow tew dress it, and her 'Yes, Doctor,' just as though she really intended tew carry aout his orders tew the letter. Come, own up. You're not going tew follow a single one of them, are you?" he added, addressing his wife with a grin. She merely smiled, but that was answer enough. He knew the thought which was in her mind: "For every wound he has dressed, have I not cared for a hundred, in the hospital in France? And did not the greatest of all surgeons—" meaning Donald, of course—" teach me how?"

Omie spoke impulsively. "Oh, I dew hope that he'll get well, soon. He has such a big work tew dew."

"Right. Still the Caounty's loss is aour gain — it's going tew be mighty interesting having some one like him tew talk with."

"Why don't you slap him for saying that, Camille? The idea, when it's his honeymoon!"

Virgil laughed and slipped his arm about his wife.

"Oh, she understands. I really meant 'some one for you tew talk with,' so that you wouldn't be pestering us all the time. I don't know what we're going tew dew with you, naow that Donald and Rose have gone and left us — temporarily, at least — to sink or swim; Margaret and Phil are off for good, only it isn't good; and the kids are all away vacationing."

"You needn't trouble tew dew anything with me,

thank you. I'll leave you alone — and I want tew be left alone, too." She paused; then added in a voice that was almost tragically mournful, "I wish I were a caow."

"A 'caow'? You!" Her brother redoubled his

laughter.

"Well, I dew. I don't see what the good is of having brains and — and feeling, anyhaow. It would be a lot more comfortable just tew exist, wander araound the maountain-side eating grass, or lie in the shade and chew your cud."

"Listen tew her, Camille. Wouldn't you think that she had a terrible life, or was seventy instead of seven-

teen?"

"I don't care. That's haow I feel, this morning."

Virgil regarded it as a rich joke, but Omie was not jesting. It would be difficult exactly to explain the girl's state of mind, at this time. Certainly she could not have done so. Too young to indulge in conscious self-analysis, she was nevertheless beginning to feel, at times, that the balance between happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and pain, was too heavily on the wrong side of Life's ledger-book. Certainly the drab, shut-in existence of the mountain people, in the midst of whom she dwelt, supplied a premise for such a conclusion. Smiling Pass had lifted her up, and with childish enthusiasm she had consecrated herself to the task of bettering those conditions, in imitation of Rose McDonald, whom she worshiped. But now "Smiles" had left them; the fountain-head of her ambition had ceased to flow, and as yet nothing else had taken its place. Omie's own impulses were too transitory and contradictory, still, to carry her steadily onward toward a goal, lacking direction from outside.

Moreover, her moods were always in part the reflection of internal and external conditions — and whose

are not? The night had been filled with excitement, with no sleep for any of them after two o'clock; the morning had been a trying one, and now the weather had suddenly changed from bright sunshine to leaden hues with the heavy threat of a storm in the dun-tinted clouds which overhung the narrow valley, as though stretched from mountain peak to mountain peak. A wash of watery gray had dulled the flaunting colors of an hour earlier. The creek had lost its appearance of laughter, and become sullen. To the South, still far in the distance, thunder was faintly growling. Already rain was beginning to fall in scattering drops, which spattered upon the veranda and were quickly drunk up by the dry boards, leaving irregular splotches.

"Well, I don't guess that I'd care much abaout being a caow in a rainstorm," remarked Virgil. "Let's

go inside."

He turned and was about to lead the way into the House of Happiness, when there fell on their ears the sound of hoofs rapidly approaching up the creek road. The next instant two riders appeared around the bend made by an out-thrust spur of the mountain, and drew near at a brisk trot. They were obviously trying to beat out the oncoming storm.

The foremost rider, a woman, caught sight of the group on the veranda at the same moment, waved a slender, gauntleted hand to them and spurred her mount to a faster pace. She rode side-saddle, but with a particularly graceful poise; her close-fitting habit was fashionably tailored, its skirt falling in graceful folds over trim riding boots. A snug, snowy-white stock accentuated the slenderness of her neck and set off the glowing color in her cheeks and the profusion of her dark hair, on which a small turban hat, with a single white plume, perched jauntily.

Omie's sharp eyes took it all in with a glance, and

she uttered a low exclamation of pleasure.

Indeed, the newcomer made a strikingly attractive picture, and behind her rode a gentleman no less striking, in his way. His somewhat corpulent form seemed to be molded into a tailored riding suit of gray tweed; shiny leather puttees encased his substantial calves; a broad-brimmed gray felt hat adorned his head. His face, too, had pronounced coloring, but - as they were to discover on closer observation — the ruddiness in his cheeks was not the healthy flush of exercise, but caused by a network of veins of red and purplish hues, and his eyes, although the same shade of bluishgray as the girl's, protruded noticeably and had a somewhat glassy look. For the rest, he wore a typical "Kentucky Colonel" imperial and mustache, its flowing ends elaborately curled, and these, like his abundant hair, were iron-gray.

Even at some distance they quite obviously appeared to be father and daughter, people of position, and dwellers of a different world outside the hills.

So few strangers — especially strangers who dressed and carried themselves in such a fashion — ever penetrated that remote mountain pass, it is small wonder that Omie remained standing in the rain, bound to the spot with excited curiosity which banished the look of discontent entirely from her face.

Virgil did not wait for the riders to reach the entrance, but anticipated them by running down the steps and steep path to swing open the gate above which was hung the sign, "SMILING PASS. Come in, Stranger." The two horses were skillfully turned into the yard on the gallop and reined up to a prancing stop, the girl at the same time calling out, gayly, "Oh,

thanks. We saw your place and hoped that you'd take us in, hyar, until the rain stops. It's going tew be only a shower, I reckon; but it sure is pelting, naow, isn't it?" Her voice was soft and pleasantly drawling.

"Sure is. Both of you run right up tew the haouse . . . I'll take care of your horses," responded Virgil, swinging the girl lightly from the saddle with his strong, young hands clasping her slender waist. Her father dismounted somewhat stiffly and awkwardly.

"Much obliged, brother," he said. "This is hos-

pitality, and -"

"Pshaw! We're 'maounting' and the maountaineer's motto is 'Howdy, stranger. Drap in and set a piece; stay the night; stay damn nigh a week'—except where suspected revenuers are concerned."

The girl laughed, a silvery note with a rising inflec-

tion.

"You-all had better not dare us like that, or we might accept. Isn't it pretty, hyar, daddy? — and unexpected, in the midst of so many dreary looking cabins."

Her father grunted an assent, for he was already panting up the steep path toward the veranda where Camille and Omie were still standing, partially sheltered within the doorway of the House of Happiness.

They reached it, and, without preface, the young woman exclaimed, "Why, you two pretty girls! Dew tell me who you are. Of course you're not maountaineers."

"But we are — at least, I am," Omie answered.

"Really? Why, you look positively — citified."

Omie's smile vanished and her eyes flashed. The words were not unfriendly, the tone was extremely cordial, even flattering; but it seemed to her to be patroniz-

ing; and she half-suspected that the speaker had caught herself just in time to substitute the word "citified" for "civilized."

The visitor did not notice the change, however, and pattered on, brightly, "And so this is 'Smiling Pass'! Haow perfectly fascinating. Dew you know, I've been wild tew come up hyar, ever since I first read abaout the wonderful things that you-all are dewing for the maountain whites "- a deadly insult, though she did not know it; "maountain whites," indeed! "I suppose you know that your school has become quite famous and been written up in the city newspapers, my dear."

She laid her gloved hand on Omie's arm in such a friendly manner that it was impossible for the latter not to melt a little and smile somewhat uncertainly. Here was indeed another new kind of creature.

"And are you one of the pupils, or a teacher? Please tell me — you might be either, you know."

"I'm both," answered the girl. "I'm learning from those who know more than I dew, and trying tew teach those who know less."

"Oh, did you hear, daddy? Isn't that delightful and such a good rule for any one tew follow. And naow that you've told me what, won't you tell me who you are, dear?"

"I'm Omie Gayheart - Virgil Gayheart's sister. And this is his wife, Camille."

"'Gayheart'? What a sweet name, and you look as though you lived up tew it, too. Did you ever hear a quotation from a famous English poet named Shakespeare, 'What's in a name?' And I remember yours, naow. The article that I read told abaout your brother's part in faounding the school; but it had even more tew say abaout a Mrs. McDonald, from Boston,

who seems tew have been nicknamed 'Smiles.' I'm sure I should just *love* tew meet her."

"I just wish that you could — might, I mean. She's wonderful!" exclaimed Omie, her own enthusiasm for 'Smiles' rekindled by their visitor's apparent eagerness. Camille nodded a shy, but happy, agreement.

"Then she isn't hyar, naow?" disappointedly.

"No. They've gone home. Her husband is a famous surgeon, you know, who was daown hyar getting well."

"Oh, I'm so sorry tew have missed them — isn't it a shame, daddy? And so you-all are left alone with your romantic experiment hyar in the maountains, dear?"

"But it isn't an experiment, any more. This is vacation; but, when we start again, other helpers are coming daown from the North, and several of aour maountain boys are already trained tew help carry on the work. Of course, we're still experimenting tew find aout what kind of training brings the best results, but—"

"But you're actually functioning." The other anticipated the conclusion, and added, "It's really splendid. And I suppose that all these neat, attractive buildings are your combined workshop and experiment station. You'll take us all through them, and explain everything tew us while we're hyar, won't you, dear?"

"I should love tew, Miss —?"

"Miss Clayton. My father is Congressman Clayton; your Representative at Washington, you know." Oh!"

Omie's eyes opened wider and a flush of sudden embarrassment flooded her cheeks. But the Honorable H. Clay Clayton's acknowledgment of this informal introduction was so simple and friendly—he raised his hat and extended his hand in such a cordial manner—

that both girls were immediately set at ease. Long practice in politics makes for affability towards men and women, old and young, alike — it is an effective asset, and by no means to be condemned on that account. Quite on the contrary, for the form, oft repeated, sometimes creates the spirit of friendliness.

Miss Clayton urged her father to join in the exploring party; but he excused himself on the plea of wanting to chat with "Mr. Gayheart," whom he had seen climbing the path, after unsaddling the horses and leaving them in the barn with a generous measure of

oats apiece.

While the three girls were inspecting the executive office, within the House of Happiness; the House of Service, with its hand looms for the weaving of old-fashioned "kivverlids," its basketry work, its printing-press — on which the only newspaper in the County was printed — multigraphing machine and carpenter shop; the library, with its swelling stacks; the up-to-date school house; the various small dormitories; the House of Hunger, with its immaculate kitchen, where the girls were taught domestic science, the two men fell into conversation without the formality of an introduction. Virgil had long since abandoned the second mountain formula, "And what mought your name and business be, stranger?"

His caller took the lead with a few pointed questions as to aims and methods; but, after a moment, he broke off, in the middle of a comment to say, "Er . . . by the way, I reckon I got a little damper than I thought, and I wonder if you've a few draps of the 'maountain dew,' for which this locality used tew be famous, abaout the premises? I occasionally take a little — ahem — as medicine, for my circulation's rather bad."

Virgil apologized.

"Sorry, but there isn't a 'drap' on the place. We live strictly according tew Volstead, hyar; although it's 'Smiles' law rather than Uncle Sam's. You may have heard of 'Smiles'—aour Mrs. McDonald."

"Yes, indeed. I've heard considerable abaout your place. It saounded like romantic fiction, but seems tew be fact. You're tew be congratulated. A fine work, and I'm right glad tew find that some one is tackling the problem of maountain education so intelligently. I was in the State Legislature when the 'Moonlight Schools' were established, and so learned a good deal about conditions. Er — we'll forget abaout the — er — medicine. I reckon I don't really need it, son."

"Some hot coffee'll dew the trick, I reckon. Which reminds me that I've got tew tell maw—" the habit of childhood still persisted—" tew set on a couple of extra plates. We don't go in for style, but you're more than welcome tew aour simple table, Mr.—?"

"Clayton's my name."

The others had just returned, and Omie slipped behind her brother and said in a whisper meant for his ear alone, but which was generally audible, "It's Congressman Clayton, Virge."

"Is that so!" exclaimed the recipient of the momentous news, thereby causing a laugh. "Well, we're more'n glad tew have you with us, Congressman."

His sister regarded him with new pride, he seemed so entirely unabashed in the presence of The Great.

The conversation was terminated by the welcome sound of the dinner bell and the visitors were led, hastening through the rain, to the House of Hunger, there to be greeted by Mrs. Gayheart, and, while the rest were being seated, Camille excused herself in order to prepare a tray for her "patient."

"Why, is there a sick person, hyar?" inquired Miss

Clayton, her voice sympathetic.

An explanation followed and when the name of the injured man was mentioned the Congressman interrupted with the exclamation, "What! Abe Blount? And shot, cutting up a still?"

"So you know Abe?" said his host.

"Know him? Know Abe Blount! Well, I should rather think I did. He's a live wire — a remarkable man." Virgil shot a triumphant glance at his sister. "And he put in a lot of effective work for me — the party,' I should say, at the last election. I've certainly got tew drop in and have a chat with him before we go, if he's able to receive callers."

"Oh, I want tew meet him, too," cried his daughter. "I believe that he gets his name in the newspapers even more than father does, and he must be a terribly

romantic person."

For no reason which she could have explained, Omie's heart experienced a sudden tug, and she was instantly angry with herself. Why shouldn't Miss Clayton be interested in their local celebrity? And of course Abe Blount would naturally be pleased to receive a visit from such a lovely, fascinating, city-bred young lady. Beside, why should she care, one way or the other?

Omie's thoughts were interrupted by a low-spoken word from Virgil: she bowed her head and began the familiar blessing, during the recital of which Miss Clayton's shapely lips might have been seen to twitch, ever so slightly. The Honorable Mr. Clayton sat with hands clasped and eyes bent towards his plate.

"Amen," said Omie.

"A-hem," said the Congressman. "Yes, I must certainly have a chat with Abe Blount."

CHAPTER VII

POLITICS AND PLATFORMS

"Hello there, Abe Blount!"

"Well, I'm — blessed. Haowdy, yourself, Clayton. Haow'd you come tew get lost up in this neck of the woods?"

"The same tew you."

"Oh, 'I didn't come tew get lost, I come on business,' as the old nigger mammy said. But I'm staying for pleasure." Abe smiled at his hosts, especially Omie, for, their dinner ended, all of the party had repaired to the hospital room where the wounded man lay.

"You needn't tell me abaout it, if modesty prevents; I've heard the whole story already. I'm on a so-called pleasure trip, predicated on business, too — owned a few hundred acres of coal land up on the next creek most of my life and never laid eyes on it until to-day. The Iron Mountain Company made me an offer for it, recently, and my daughter insisted that nothing would dew but we must don boots and spurs, ride up hyar and look the lay-aout over. By the way, this is the cause of all my gray hairs, my daughter, Miss Marion Clayton, Sheriff Blount. Dew you blame me for taking orders from her?"

"Not by a jugful. Reckon any man would be praoud

and happy tew dew the same."

The transforming smile accompanied Abe's hearty response, and he extended his huge hand to the girl. Miss Clayton had already bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, swiftly composing her face which

had been a study from the moment she passed the door and had caught sight of the man stretched out on the cot. For once she had found herself temporarily at a loss for words. She had been surprised, almost shocked; but training had enabled her to dissemble reasonably well. Her poise had returned quickly, and her conventional, smiling mask had been resumed; but Omie's sharp eyes had observed the momentary start, and she, forgetful of her own earlier sensations, had felt her heart burning with resentment. And now her indignation increased, but was directed against Abe Blount. How had he dared to make fun of her by saying that he was afraid of women and did not know how to talk with them? He certainly showed no bashfulness before Miss Clayton, and his words concerning her had been glib and flattering enough!

For her part, Marion Clayton hesitated for an instant before taking the proffered hand. Then she smiled, frankly, overlooking the breach of social etiquette—of course an uncultured mountaineer would not know anything about its dictates!—and her slender fingers were laid upon the man's big hand, although they barely extended from one side of the palm to the

other.

Abe's own friendly smile broadened.

"It is more like a ham than a hand, Miss Clayton," he remarked, quizzically.

"Ah, but I just adore big men," was her gay reply. "And so this is aour 'Demon Destroyer of Stills'? I've heard such wonderful things abaout you that I've been simply dying tew meet you, Mr. Blount."

"Well, here I am; look me over! I once knew a lawyer who won a big case on the strength of saying that, Clayton. He came from Louisville, and his country opponent was vastly *im*pressed and *distressed* by

the fact that he'd got tew try against a man with such a reputation. Well, in his opening tew the jury he dwelt at length upon the other's great ability, and got the jurors all haired up abaout it, and filled with awe. When it came the city man's turn tew address 'em, he strode up tew the rail, stuck his thumbs intew the armholes of his vest, threw aout his chest and exclaimed, 'Well, gentlemen, hyar I am!' He had 'em, from that moment."

"Bet you were the fellow, Abe," declared the Congressman.

"I? Not much — I'm too doggone modest."

Clayton laughed immoderately, and thrust a finger into Abe's ribs.

"Well, what's this I hear abaout your 'gittin' yourself shotted,' as you maountaineers say? Was it a frame-up, for political purposes? Of course it's certain sure tew result in a wave of righteous indignation and sympathy for you; for the pencil toters'll make copy aout of it, and write you up again, more the hero than ever. I never knew such a man for keeping the spot-light centered on himself — I know I can't succeed in dewing it."

"Naturally it distresses me beyond the paower of words tew express." Abe's gray eyes continued to twinkle. "It's one of the drawbacks tew seeking public office. We have tew go to almost any lengths tew keep aourself in the public eye, even tew sticking aour feet in front of a rifle bullet."

"I see you've got the right idea, Abe. The office should theoretically seek the man, but—"

"But he ought tew holler aout, 'Yo-ho' from his place of concealment, naow and then?"

"Exactly."

"I think it's perfectly horrid of you tew make a joke

of such a serious matter, father," broke in Miss Clayton. "How is the wound getting along, Mr. Blount?"

"Getting along fine, thanks. You see, my foot's in good hands. I've got the best nurse in these hyar maountains, if not in the world."

He smiled at Camille, who was keeping herself well

in the background.

"And haow abaout your other chief concern, the campaign? I hear you're aout for State's Attorney, naow. Is that in good hands, too, while you're laid up?" the Congressman resumed his interrogation.

"Yes. Of course daoubtful things are always uncertain; but it looks pretty good, thanks tew what three persons have already accomplished in my be-

half."

"Three, eh? That's more campaign managers than

I can get. Who are they?"

"Well, Preacher Billy, who lives near hyar, and helped bring me up, is one. Another is a maountain woman who moved daown tew Fayville and opened up an eating place of sorts, some years ago, there. And the third is the Honorable Jonathan Fess."

"What, not the present encumbent? Why, I thought that he was a candidate for reëlection and

that you were aout tew unseat him."

"Which air a fact," drawled Abe, whimsically. "Just the same, he's my best card, for he tried tew play both ends against the middle, and stand in with everybody—law-makers and law-breakers, alike. As far as I can find aout he didn't succeed in making any particular friends dewing it, but he made plenty of enemies, on both sides of the fence. You know what happened tew the man who tried tew sit on two stools at the same time."

"I see. Still, I should think that you'd have the moonshiners and their friends solid against you, in any case, and—"

"I don't guess that Jonathan can caount too heavily on that. A right smart number of my constituents have an idea that I'd be less of a nuisance in the new job than loose tew go chasing araound these hills looking for trouble — or making it."

"Besides," interpolated Virgil, "aour maountain people admire honesty and pluck, even when they're on the other side, and we're all mighty praoud of Abe

Blount."

Miss Clayton clapped her hands softly, and her father said, "That's the stuff. Well, so much for one of your campaign managers. What abaout this maountain café keeper? Dew you make her hashery your headquarters, or have you discovered that the way to a voter's heart is through his stomach?"

"Neither. Jonathan was really responsible for her climbing on my band wagon, too, and I'm right sorry for him, I sure am. Heaven help the man — especially a political candidate — who runs a-faoul of Aunt Phronie's tongue. You see, he opened his campaign in Fayville and had the bad luck — or bad judgment, as is more often the case — tew go intew her eating place for a bite. The poor cuss had indigestion and he ordered weak tea and poached eggs, soft, on milk toast. Well —"

The rest of the story was lost in a gale of laughter, for all of them could imagine how such an order, from one who sought to be elected chief law enforcer in *that* county, would have struck a woman of the mountains, whose bill-of-fare consisted primarily of black coffee, corn pone, fried hog and hominy. Abe did not add

that Aunt Phronie had nicknamed the unfortunate Mr. Fess "the soft-drapped egg"—a title which had been duly broadcast through the region.

"As for Preacher Billy, he's a character and you ought tew meet him sometime, Clayton. He — well,

he sort of pushed me intew the pond."

"Hmm. Saounds as though there might be a story in that, too. Don't try tew hold aout on us, Abe Blount."

"Oh, it wasn't anything tew speak of. He started the ball a-rolling, on his own hook — made a speech and uncorked some of that picturesque fiction that preachers make use of, occasionally. It sort of 'tuck hold' up hyar — we maountaineers are simple folk and tickled with a straw, you know. I didn't know but what you read it, for it got printed in the papers, and —"

"No, I missed it, I reckon. But I'll hear it naow."

"Not much, you won't."

"Yes, he will," broke in Virgil; "for, if Abe's too modest tew tell it, I'm going tew. I didn't hear Billy's speech — worse luck, because, although he hasn't much 'book-larnin' he can sure put words together when he gets started — but I read the story in the paper. It happened on the opening day of the spring session of the Circuit Court, which you probably know is always devoted to politics, Congressman. It's aour famous 'swapping-day,' too, and the newspaper had sent a man to write it up as a picturesque maountain custom. He fell hard for aour Preacher Billy, whom he called a forceful, born orator, and he quoted him as having said something like this: 'Evil had growed up in these hyar hills 'til hit war a giant like untew Goliath, the terribul champeen uv the army uv the Philistines that the Book tells us abaout. Hit war a-shaoutin' aout a challenge a-mockin' 'em. And then thar riz up in aour midst another David. The Bible David war uv the seed uv Abraham, but this war an Abraham, hisself. A slingshot war in his mighty hand—the rock uv the Law. You all knows him, aour Sheriff, Abe Blount. With that rock he has already stunned the Goliath uv Iniquity. But he hain't slain hit, as yet, whatever. Hit's evil body encumbers aour land. Come naow. Let us stand with Abe, aour David. Let us put in his paowerful hands the two-edged sword of Justice, so thet he may slay the giant, altogether!"

The spirit of raconteur in Virgil rose to the occasion, and he spoke movingly. Omie experienced a strange thrill at the words, which was intensified by the sudden recollection that Abe Blount, as a small boy, had sworn to Billy that he would grow up to be "a David." And now his preceptor had publicly bestowed that name upon him! The other hearers were also stirred, in varying degrees. The story carried an analogy which could be understood by any one who had read the Old Testament, and it appealed to the imagination.

But Abe broke in with a loud guffaw, in part, no doubt, to cover his embarrassment.

"I'm a fine one tew be likened tew 'little David,' ain't I?" he demanded, an awkward gesture calling attention to his massive form.

Marion Clayton answered.

"Size is always a matter of relativity, Mr. Blount. I think that Preacher Billy's comparison was perfect, as well as picturesque, and from naow on I'm going tew think of you as the chosen champion of law and order in these hills."

"Well, that's sure kind of you, Miss Clayton. Only I haven't been chosen, yet."

"Oh, you're going tew be. And I want Mr. State's Attorney Blount to come and pay us a visit when he's in Cumberland City. Please promise."

"I should love tew."

"Fine. Marion merely beat me tew it, in issuing the invitation. But then, she generally does, and it's more official coming from her, for she's the real boss of the household. I sometimes talk large, in public, but I'm pretty small potatoes at home, and don't dare tew ask any one there withaout first getting the approval of the boss," said the Congressman.

The Congressman's daughter declared this to be false and slanderous; but it was reaffirmed, and for some minutes the conversation became general and was car-

ried on in a lighter vein.

But the politician eventually reverted to the subject of politics, by asking, "Just why dew you want the job of State's Attorney, Abe? Of course it may be a stepping stone, but—"

"No. I'm not thinking of going intew politics seriously. I rather hope it may be a *corner*-stone in building up my legal practice. It'll be good training—"

"And advertising!"

"Maybe; that depends. It might work the other way. Sometimes I think that I'm a fool not tew go back into private practice right away, but there are — well, certain other considerations. As I look at it, a man can't always follow his own inclinations; at least, not if he's troubled with a civic conscience — I'm not saying anything abaout my personal one."

"Of course; the least said on that score the better,"

laughed Mr. Clayton. "Am I right?"

"'You're blanked right, you're right! 'as Bill Cress says, with one variation. Seriously speaking, though, conditions are pretty bad in these parts; a heavy hand

is needed tew enforce the law hyar and I've modestly decided that I'm the best of a poor lot available tew dew it. It isn't merely a question of moonshining, or general lawlessness — they're both nation-wide, naowa-days. But there's another sort of trouble being brewed in these hills, and it strikes deeper than either of the others."

"Is that so? What is it?"

"You know haow the coal mines are being pushed steadily further and further intew these maountains . . ."

"And you think there'll be more strikes?"

"Baound tew be! But that isn't what I had in mind, altogether. Of course if I get elected State's Attorney I might have tew take a hand in them, for there'd likely be criminal cases growing aout of them, which I'd have tew prosecute — and I wouldn't love tew dew it, since I've got considerable sympathy for the miners. I was one, myself, for a few months, you know, and realize something abaout haow tough their lives are."

"Oh, of course. But lives and property rights are sacred and have got tew be protected."

"Certain sure. When my sympathies and the law get in conflict, the law has the right of way, although I like tew see justice based on understanding, and tempered with a reasonable amaount of mercy. But what I had in mind was something different and more dangerous than strikes. A good many of the miners are riffraff from Southern Europe, and chocked plumb full of socialistic and anarchistic ideas — Bolshevists. There are plenty of I.W.W.'s among them and they've already got a systematic campaign started tew poison the minds of us maountaineers. It's easy, too, for a lot of them are getting jobs in the mines, naow."

"I've heard rumors of something of the sort, but haven't taken them very seriously," remarked Clayton.

"Well, it's abaout time that folks did, including you fellows daown in Washington. The situation holds a menace which may become more than local; it may be national."

As he continued to talk, Abe's manner underwent a subtle alteration. A new, intense light came into his eyes; his voice remained low, but it took on a new timbre, losing its conversational tone and growing forceful, as though the walls of the little room had been pushed back and his audience multiplied a hundredfold. Still, he was not excited and his manner was rather judicial than argumentative.

"Hyar's the case in a nutshell; I've put some time intew studying it. You don't have tew be told what the Coal Operators did in these maountains in years past, and are still dewing tew some extent, although I reckon that they've made you a fair offer for your property. It's common knowledge haow they sent their agents in hyar and bought up the land for a song - or the mineral rights in it, which amaounts tew the same thing. Aour maountain people were wholly illiterate and had no knowledge of the value of money. Tew the Operators it was strictly a matter of business, and it was 'good business' tew buy as cheaply as possible. But what seems like 'good business' to-day may prove tew be something entirely different, to-morrow, as they're beginning tew find aout. It depends on what sort of bread you cast upon the waters!

"There were plenty of cases where they bought these maountain-sides for as low as a dollar an acre—yes, for twenty-five cents an acre, although in one instance

the Courts set that sale aside on the graounds of no real consideration. Take my own family's case, for a concrete example. My grandma was left a widow and all her possessions were the cabin and five hundred acres of maountain land behind it. There was a big family tew support, and in those days a dollar looked the size of a haouse, hyar-abaouts. One day up rode the smooth-tongued representative of a certain coal company whose engineers had discovered that that particular hill was rich in deposits of abaout the best high volatile bituminous coal in the world. He offered grandma five hundred dollars in cold cash for those five hundred maountain-side acres of hers, generously granting her the privilege of retaining the homestead cabin and of digging what coal she needed for the family use, during her lifetime, but forgetting tew inform her that these provisions would lapse with her death, and of course she couldn't read the deed of sale. Well, put yourselves in her place, if you can. She did the natural thing, took the seeming fortune and made her mark at the foot of the agreement."

At this point in his story Abe was interrupted by varying exclamations of an indignant nature, but he disregarded them and went quietly on.

"Last year I became pretty well acquainted, by chance, with an engineer employed by the same corporation that is naow working that hillside — I'll tell you in confidence that it's the Iron Maountain Mine — and I pumped him a bit, aout of idle curiosity, as tew the probable value of the coal contained in my ancestral acres, dug aout and ready tew be shipped. I was going tew let you guess, but I won't. He said that they estimated that the vein would average a depth of six feet and should yield over three million tons. Coal of

that grade is worth something better than \$1.25, f.o.b. at the minehead and, well, you-all can dew your own figuring."

Again his hearers broke in with sympathetic or angry comments, but Abe listened to them in silence, and when he resumed his story it was with no change in tone or manner.

"Of course the figure wouldn't represent *profit* on it, that might be but a few cents per ton; but if her descendants still owned the property and got a royalty of from fifteen tew twenty cents a ton aout of it, it would eventually bring them in something like three-quarters of a million dollars. And grandma, through her ignorance of its potential value — of any value, indeed — was inveigled intew parting with it for five hundred!

"Naow, that's only a sample case. The same thing has happened time and again, and plenty of the descendants of those who jumped at the shiny bait, and got hooked, aren't inclined tew be as philosophical abaout it as I am, naow that they're finally waking up tew the fact that their paws and maws were exploited and, through ignorance, sold their birthright for a 'pot of message,' as Billy said in telling the story of Esau. We're Anglo-Saxon, you know.

"Well, that'll give you an idea of the sort of a field that is ready tew be sowed, hyar; it's already plaowed and harrowed for the sort of seed these foreign socialists and Independent Workers of the World are beginning tew scatter. Haven't you ever heard of 'Dago Lemos' and his preachings? God knows, we're most of us still primitive and ignorant enough, and easily araoused by any appeal tew aour passions, like this, for example: 'These greedy, soulless corporations have plumb stolen your lands from you; robbed you of your

birthright! They are big and paowerful, and the law is on their side because they control its processes through political pressure and bribery. You are helpless because you don't fight together; but just unite and join with us, brother, and we'll form a new party in these maountains, one so strong that it'll be invincible. We'll name aour own candidates, and *elect* them—first the minor caounty officers, then those of the State and Nation, and at last we'll overthrow this rotten Government. "Rotten Government?" Yes! What has it ever done for you, but rob you of your rights with its Revenuers? You've been the victims of a Government which allaows and encourages robbery by the rich; but just unite with us and we'll give you back freedom and the land that is rightfully yours."

"But that's daownright anarchy!" cried the Congressman, his face red with righteous indignation.

"Sure it is; but it's not just one of my pipe dreams; it's a fact. Haven't they already tried to elect some of their candidates, and come pretty darned near dewing it?"

"Yes. But I had no idea that there was so much behind it."

"Well, there is, Clay. You can take my say-so for it. It isn't as though we maountain people were a negligible number — a scattering handful of illiterates, as the big majority of folks in America probably think. There are pretty nigh ontew five million of us living in the highlands of these five States, and half of us uneducated, hot-tempered and ready for mischief. If the people of the United States would only wake up tew that fact, they might realize that right hyar is an almost untapped reservoir of the only pure Anglo-Saxon blood in the country, which would come in mighty handy in strengthening up the national blood-stream. Heaven

knows it's badly enough diluted, naow. But it won't be worth much if it's left alone tew get more and more stagnant, and these fellows are allaowed tew pollute it with their Bolshevism. If that fully happens, Clay, there's going tew be hell tew pay hyar, one of these days.

"Of course the only real antidote is education, especially in the real meaning of citizenship. But that's being handed aout in mighty small doses, so far. And, until schools like this one at Smiling Pass can be multiplied a thousand times, the only thing tew hold the situation in check is the Law.

"I reckon that's why I'm running for office, naow. I want tew dew my bit tew save my own people from this sort of aoutside lawlessness, as well as the lawlessness within themselves. And that's a-plenty."

CHAPTER VIII

THE BROADENING HORIZON

During the latter part of this recital Congressman Clayton had remained leaning forward, and he had played nervously with his heavy gold watch chain as he listened. Interest and astonishment had mounted steadily, and their mingled expression upon his florid countenance was reflected on the faces of the others, in different degrees. Omie observed it with a sense of pride, newly born. After all, the man who had asked her to be her friend was, as Virgil had said, different from other men. There seemed to be as many sides to his character as facets to a diamond, yet they were really no more conflicting in his case than in that of the stone. Each merely supplemented the others. One never knew which was next to catch the light, and flash or glow. And his outward appearance, so crude and unprepossessing on first sight, added to his interestingness, for his real self, as disclosed by his talk, was made the more remarkable by contrast.

When Abe abruptly ended his remarks, the Congressman brought his hand down on his stocky leg with a

resounding whack.

"Well, by Jingo, I knew that you were an aout-of-the-ordinary cuss, Abe Blount, but you run deeper than I thought. You've made aout your case—'sold' me. I hadn't begun tew realize that the situation was actually that bad, or that the office of State's Attorney in this particular caounty could hold such potentialities. I've always looked on it as a sort of cut-and-dried post, all right for a young man trying tew make a reputation

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as a lawyer, but not worth bothering abaout, politically. After all, it is the man that makes the office and not vice versa. What you propose, by inference, tew dew with it will take nerve; but I reckon that we needn't dew much worrying on that score. I'm with you. Yes, sir, you can caount on my help in this fight. It probably isn't worth as much in these parts as your Preacher Billy's or Aunt Phronie's, but it ought tew be worth a good many votes in the few taowns of the Caounty."

"Why, I'm much obliged tew you, Clay," responded the Sheriff, with a quick return to his easy, conversational manner. "I reckon I can dew with all the extra ones that come my way. Awhile ago I said something abaout not being much worried over the outcome, but any man who's candidate for an elective office, and gets it intew his head that the apple is going tew fall right intew his hands withaout his even giving the tree a shake, is more likely tew get it in the neck."

"Right! Still, assuming that you're elected—"

"Better make that 'if' I'm elected," Abe corrected.

"Oh, I guess that the assumption is a reasonable one; you're not the type of man tew indulge in ephemeral dreams. What I started aout tew say was, if you make the same sort of a reputation for yourself as State's Attorney as you have as Sheriff you're going tew be more'n a local celebrity — I shouldn't wonder if you had a State-wide reputation, and then there'll be no holding you daown, if you keep your head and play the game. The 'dear peepul' love tew have a picturesque figure, like you, tew vote for."

"Picturesqueness rather than ability is the prerequi-

site, then?"

The Congressman smiled.

"That's a debatable point. Once I might have said 'yes,' withaout hesitation; but the day when the In-

terests picked the candidates — the 'safe and sane' men, from their standpoint, and if they tickled the people so much the better — and put them across regularly, is ended — er — fortunately. Joking aside, though, it strikes me that you've got certain characteristics which may land you fairly high up, politically, even in the Governor's seat one of these days, Abe."

His daughter nodded an enthusiastic agreement, whereupon Omie experienced the same thrill of excitement which had passed through her several times that

day.

But the object of these flattering prophecies merely grinned and drawled, "Looking ahead pretty far, ain't you, Clay? Reminds me of the yarn abaout the Hebrew family and the imaginary automobile. Reckon you've heard it, but it's sort of apropos, and maybe the others haven't. We don't have many motor cars or jokes abaout 'em along these hyar maountain creeks. I once heard Uncle Bije say, 'I've heerd tell uv them thar autybeemoles, but I hain't never seed one.'"

Marion demanded the story and Abe said, "One evening, Ikey annaounced that he was thinking some of buying a second-hand flivver, someday, maybe, perhaps, and the family started making plans abaout it. 'I'm going tew sit on the *front* seat, mit mein fadder,' declared little Ikey. 'No, mein child,' his mother replied, 'you vill sit on the *back* seat, mit me.' 'But I vant tew sit on the *front* seat!' insisted the boy, beginning tew blubber. 'Naow, Ikey . . .' 'I vill sit on the front seat!' he shrieked, and his father grabbed him by the arm, saying sternly, 'Ikey, you naughty boy, you get righd aoudt of this automobile.'"

The story got more laughter than would have been accorded it by a group of city people, but Abe was serious again when he went on, "I meant it when I

said I wasn't thinking of going intew politics, regularly; but I wouldn't mind being Governor of Cumberland for a term or two, if you can arrange it for me conveniently, Clay. Seriously, if some man who really understood us maountaineers and aour problems could get himself elected tew that exalted office, he could dew a lot towards bettering conditions hyar, by influencing public opinion and legislation. Haowever, I don't guess that I'll order a suit of clothes for the inaugural, yet. I've got pretty long legs, but it's some step from the office of State's Attorney of a backwood caounty tew the Governorship of the State of Cumberland — and I haven't landed the first job, at the date of these presents."

"I thought we'd got that all settled," said the Congressman. "I may have suggested a long step, but I also remarked, awhile ago, that the first office may be made a political stepping-stone. Only, take the advice of an old-timer, and don't linger in it too long. There'll always be plenty of uncompleted work tew be done, and if you show a willingness tew tackle its problems and make good dewing it, there'll be plenty of people who'll expect you tew keep on and on, walking the same old treadmill, and who'll be the first tew set up a haowl that you're committing an almost criminal act when you aspire to some position offering broader opportunities."

"Or think that you've received a higher call,"

amended Abe, with a grin.

"I stand corrected; of course that's haow I should have put it, there being voters present. You've got the makings of a pol, all right. Still, mine is good advice. The longer a man allaows himself to be kept in a subordinate position, the harder it will be for him tew secure a superior one. Let's see haow things go

during the next year. If you dew what I expect, and tear this Caounty wide open, I wouldn't be surprised if you'd be the logical man tew succeed me in Congress, as Representative from the Twelfth District. From that office the Governorship isn't so far away."

"Meaning that you have thoughts of —?"

"On the contrary, I've abaout made up my mind tew bring my political life tew a close — although that isn't for publication. I've got abaout 'fed up,' and in my opinion three terms in Congress is enough for any man. It takes at least a year there tew get acclimated, so tew speak, and become of any real value, so a Representative actually owes it tew his constituents tew serve at least a second term, if they'll elect him. But I've done my share; I'm not ashamed of my record, and I'm ready tew give a final accaounting and surrender my trust intew other hands," said Mr. Clayton, with perhaps pardonable pomposity. And he added, "Besides, the job has pretty nearly made a bankrupt of me, and if I'm tew rebuild my law practice and leave a few dollars, instead of debts, tew this daughter of mine, it's high time I was starting. A bachelor of simple tastes can get by in Washington, and even save a little of his salary; but a man with a family with some social inclinations finds seventy-five hundred dollars too little by a lot, even with the perquisites added."

"' Perquisites?'" echoed Abe, inquiringly.

"Oh, I didn't mean anything insidious. The good old days when the ways were greased, frequently, are over. But there are certain entirely legal and customary 'extras'—allowances of one kind or another, which you'll learn abaout when you get there. I know that I spent all that was coming tew me, and more, each year, with only one wife and one child

tew help me, and the Lord only knows haow some of my colleagues, who have large families, get by, unless

they have independent means."

"Listen tew him, friends!" exclaimed Abe, screwing his face up comically. "He doesn't know haow men with large families get by on seven thousand, five hundred per — with perquisites. Wonder haow he thinks we maountaineers succeed in raising a dozen or more youngsters on a salary of nothing a year? By the way, Miss Clayton, dew you know why we maountaineers have such big families?"

"I don't guess so, unless it's because you love chil-

dren more than most people."

"Well, naow, that's a much prettier reason than the one I once heard an old fellow over tew Bear's Maouth Creek give an inquisitive 'furriner,' one day. Said he, 'We-uns hev big famblies bekaise we hev tew in order tew git a fair sprinklin' uv boys. Then some uv 'em will dew a leetle work, kaise they loves their maw; some'll dew a leetle, kaise they fears their paw; and some a leetle, kaise they hain't got no better sense. And 'twixt them all dewin' a leetle, and me and their maw dewin' a h—l uv a lot, we manages tew git along."

"That's the ultimate word!" cried the Congressman, rising. "Abe's a hopelessly confirmed storyteller — almost as bad in that respect as the still more famous bearer of the name was - and I've got tew get my unsophisticated daughter aout of hyar before he tells one worse than that. Besides, it's high time that we were on aour way, if we're going tew reach home to-night. And I see that the rain has

stopped."

Marion Clayton also arose, real regret at leaving depicted upon her vivacious face. The whole experience had been a novel one and its very simplicity had enchanted her, for the moment. She paused to comment, somewhat extravagantly, upon the loveliness of the spot, insisting that they were to be envied for such a scene of peaceful charms — how gladly would she exchange for it the bustle of city life, even that of the Capital itself! Then came farewells; a renewed and pressing invitation extended to Abe to visit them in Cumberland City; another to the trio whose hospitality they had so much enjoyed, couched in terms so general as really to mean nothing, however. Virgil went on before; saddled their horses, which were restless and mettlesome after their dinner of oats, and the Congressman and his daughter mounted and rode away, waving a friendly adieu.

The storm had brought them, the sun shone with friendly warmth as they departed, yet, unknown to any of them, either guests or hosts, they had unconsciously sown the seed of a wind from which a whirlwind was to spring. And in the reaping of it all were to share, although the shares were to differ.

CHAPTER IX

FIRST REACTIONS

"Isn't she just adorable," said Omie, enthusiastically, as Miss Clayton disappeared from their view.

Camille replied, "Yes, she ees veree pretty, but—"
The younger girl shot a surprised glance at her

The younger girl shot a surprised glance at her sister-in-law, from under lifted eyebrows. Camille's tone and words indicated disagreement or qualification, and there was a challenging retort on the tip of Omie's tongue. She left it unspoken, however. The knowledge that her impulsive, snap judgments as to people sometimes had to be reversed almost as soon as formed, to her discomfiture, was too fresh in her mind. At the same time she assured herself that Marion Clayton was lovely and wonderful, altogether a creature to be envied, and the thought brought the inevitable comparison. Omie's mercurial spirits dropped again.

Even in vacation time there were dishes to be washed, beds to be made and clothes to be mended, and Camille, the housewife, had begun to comment in some dismay on the fact that the day was already two-thirds passed and almost nothing had been done, when she was interrupted by the deep voice of her patient calling out a request that they return and stay with him a little while longer. He put the whine of a sick child into his tone so effectively that the two girls could not resist it, and laughingly went back into the room, "for just a moment." Virgil rejoined them there, a second later, and then Mrs. Gayheart, who had known Abe as a boy.

"But now you should rest. You are seek, and

have already had too much of companee, to-day," asserted Camille, trying to appear stern. "Your foot, 'ow ees eet?"

"All dressed up and nowhere tew go; but it's feeling better every second. Please sit daown again, for a few minutes, anyway. I haven't had just a vacation, with feminine company, since — I don't believe that I ever did have one, and, naow that I'm beginning tew get a mite accustomed tew it, I like it."

"Perhaps you're like the coon who was told that they were going tew hang him the next morning, and said that he didn't guess he was going tew enjoy that much, but he supposed that he could get used tew it," interpolated Virgil with a grin, hurriedly dodging, as

his sister pretended to cuff his ear.

The girl was the first fully to yield to Abe's importunings. Seating herself on the foot of the bed, her bare elbow resting on her crossed knees, her chin supported by her cupped hand, and eyes sparkling with enthusiasm, she exclaimed, "Oh, I should think you'd be too praoud for anything, Mr. — Abe! Tew have a *Congressman* say such splendid things abaout you, and that you'll be sent tew Congress, yourself, and then be Governor of Cumberland —"

"Omie, you stop that automobile and get right aout — you're driving at altogether too fast a clip for a man used tew riding only in maountain joltwagons, or on a meditative mule."

She laughed gleefully, with a gurgling, childlike note which brought a gleam of amused appreciation to the man's eyes, and to his heart a resolve that he would make her repeat it often.

"But Mr. Clayton saounded as though he really meant what he said, and if he'll throw you his support—" Virgil commenced almost as eagerly, but was

interrupted by Abe's dry rejoinder, "Ever hear the old saying abaout not caounting unhatched chickens? Likewise the Psalmist's warning, 'Put not your trust in Princes'? I don't take Clay's generalizations too seriously; his flattering cordiality doesn't mean anything, and isn't meant tew. You see, he's a regular old line politician, with the whole bag of tricks; what we call an accomplished 'glad-hand artist,' naow-adays. I shouldn't be saying this unless I were sure that I'm among friends, and I don't want you tew think I don't like him. I do. 'He's all right as far as he goes, but he doesn't go so very dommed far,' as the Irishman put it. So does most everybody like him, for he's a good mixer, affable, looks the part, and usually votes for everything that he thinks the majority wants, regardless. I wouldn't be surprised if he sometimes hears the crack of Malley's whip and acts accordingly; but in the main he's in favor of things - farm aid, educational aid, maternity aid, government ownership, free seeds, good crops, fair weather. In fact, anything that's likely tew be popular with the people."

Virgil laughed, then asked, "Is Malley still actually the political boss in the State? I kind of thought —"

"Oh, I reckon most folks would say that we'd aoutgrown that sort of thing, and there hain't no sech animal as a political boss, naow-a-days. Well, maybe not; not the old-fashioned, uncraowned Czar whose rule everybody knew abaout and recognized, anyway. Have you got a book called 'Coniston,' by Winston Churchill, in your famous library, Omie? Virgil aought tew read it if he's interested in politics, for it gives a mighty good picture of that kind of boss. Malley isn't anything like that, of course. He keeps himself aout of the public eye so well that probably

half the people in the State never even heard of him, and would haw-haw at the suggestion that he was a pernicious influence in politics, to-day. But — well, I don't know, but I have a hunch that he's still a sort of Field Marshal directing the campaign from his dug-aout. Don't quote me, though; a lawyer, especially, has no business tew make allegations that he can't prove, and I haven't any evidence in support of my theory."

"You speak as though you thought you could dig some up, if necessary," suggested Virgil, and Abe

laughed.

"Well, I'm not likely tew start tilting at windmills, just at present; corn-stills are taking all my time." He caught the puzzled look on Omie's face and digressed long enough to recommend that she read "Don Quixote," sometime.

"I will," said the girl, "and I'm going tew read 'Coniston,' too, and I want tew know all abaout this Mr. Malley. I hadn't any idea that politics

could be so interesting."

"For goodness' sake don't you allaow yourself tew be bitten by the bug. One who does is never the same again," responded Abe, solemnly. "Politics is fascinating; so is the habit of taking drugs, I've heard. As tew this man Malley, whom I've been making such a bugaboo aout of, he's a lawyer, and an able one, that lives daown at the State Capital. His practice is mostly with corporations, especially the big coal Operators; but not so many years ago he was the king of lobbyists and, although he's never seen anywhere near the Legislative chambers, naow, my guess is that he's still the commander-in-chief of a paowerful and high-salaried lobby."

"And what's a lobby?" demanded Omie, who was

beginning to feel quite proud of the knowledge of

politics which she was gaining.

Her instructor explained, in simple language, continuing, "In addition to that, I believe that he stays aout of sight behind the scenes and pulls the strings which make the mannikins aout on the stage move. It's fairly easy for him tew h'ist them up intew the seats of the mighty, and all the little fellows have tew dew is stick in their grooves and get shoved along. You see, it's a heap sight cheaper for the Interests which Malley represents tew spend a given amaount of money in advance, assuring the election of the sort of men who can be relied on tew vote 'right,' then tew trust tew his being able tew buy their Legislative votes, afterwards — especially naow-a-days, when the Public has been fed up on stories of graft and is strong for Purity in Politics."

"Well, I don't see what difference it makes when

they spend the money—" Omie began.

"It's not so much a question of 'when' as 'haow.' They don't buy the Legislator's vote, they buy the votes of the people who elect him, indirectly, by controlling the press, hiring halls, sending aout speakers, and furnishing brass bands and red fire. There's a law called the 'Corrupt Practice Act' against spending more than a limited amount in the Primary election, but there are a hundred ways of getting araound that. And friend M.— for 'Michael'— Burke Malley is master of them all. At least, 'that's my story, and I'm going tew stick tew it.'

"Haven't I heard that he was a 'furriner'—I mean that he came hyar from another state, when he

was a young man?" inquired Virgil.

"Like enough. And originally from another country, according tew the tell. It's been rumored that

he was born in Ireland, where the smartest of aour American politicians are bred, and that he started life as plain Mickey O'Malley — not that that's anything against him. Maybe he figured that the 'O' would be aout of style daown Saouth and he dropped it on the way, but it's sort of queer that he came Saouth at all, instead of heading for New York or Boston and queerer still that he turned Republican. Maybe he thought that the field for exercising his talents wouldn't be so craowded, daown hyar — and there are political strings tew be pulled, anywhere."

"I don't guess that he'll ever have any on you,"

declared Omie.

Abe smiled at her vehemence. "And I guess that your guess is a safe one. I daoubt if Malley has ever heard my name, even, and he doesn't bother tew bait his hook for small fry from these maountains."

"Well, he couldn't land you, if he did."

Still more amused, he said, teasingly, "You never can tell. They say that every man has his price. I sure would love tew have him try it."

"Abe Blount, you wouldn't!"

"Would. Then at least I'd know that I had grown intew a fish big enough to make a splash and attract his attention, anyway. Haowever, the prospect of having tew fight against that particular temptation isn't worrying me a great deal, naow. And, tew tell the truth, I think I've got too much sporting blood in my veins tew get any fun aout of sitting in a game with the gang, knowing that the cyards were stacked and that we were almost dead certain tew win. I believe I'd enjoy it more, trying tew beat the machine and getting run off my feet, than ride tew glory in it, with someone else steering it along the same old ruts on the same old road. That's one reason why I

didn't take much stock in Clay's pipe dreams on my accaount. Mighty slim chance I'd have tew get myself elected tew any office that Malley and his machine cared a cent abaout, such as Representative. And Clay knows it."

"But — but the people dew the electing, don't

they? And —"

"Oh, sure. And once in a while we get all het up over some reform, and the old gang gets a licking. Not very often, though. We like tew think that we dew aour own thinking, but it's generally secondhand — just what the political spellbinders and the press hand aout. That's natural. We've got other affairs, which seem a whole lot more important, tew attend tew. And, naow-a-days, the Malleys don't have tew dew anything so crude as offer bribes. Money still talks, but in a different way. It says tew the small newspapers 'I'll buy so many news columns a week from you and - er -, by the way, I'd appreciate it if you'll also print an editorial favoring my candidate'; and tew the big ones it is even more polite, on the surface. A mere hint is generally enough, since the Big Interests are generally the chief stockholders. And where does the aoutsider stand with the paower of the Press solid against him?"

"Oh, Abe, I think that's perfectly horrid," exclaimed Omie, with real distress. "Why, if that's so, Congressman Clayton must be one of that awful Mr.

Malley's —"

"Hold on, hold on. I'm talking generalities, not personalities, naow. We don't want tew slander an estimable gentleman — two of 'em, in fact, for the awful Mr. Malley is said tew be a charming fellow. And there's no need of being so terribly shocked; it isn't necessarily as bad as it saounds. Machine politicians aren't all crooks, by any means; I'm certain that Clay isn't one; and, besides, we mustn't forget that, after they're elected, they're not politicians, at all, they're *Statesmen*. They call their methods being 'practical,' and I reckon it is. Business is business. The surest way tew keep moving at the head of the procession is tew climb on the band-wagon and take a ride. Folks see you sitting pretty there and get the idea that you must be a mighty big man. And it's not fer me tew say that Clayton, or any other in-dividual, is a wrong-dewer; that's a question for a man's own conscience, and if he honestly believes that the system is all right, all right. But I think it's all wrong, so, if you ever see me riding on the band wagon, I shall expect you tew end aour friendship. If you fight hard for a thing, you always appreciate it more than if it came easy, and that may be why Clay is thinking of quitting Congress; but, well, it may saound like knocking, but I'll bet it's the best job he ever had in his life, or ever will have. You might say the same abaout plenty of others in Congress, today, I guess likely; but there are plenty of exceptional men there, too."

"I suppose so," agreed Virgil. "After all, they are just what their title says — Representative of the rest of us, good, bad and indifferent; able, ordinary and bone-headed."

"Right. And it's probably a good thing, too. The rest of us average folks wouldn't be able tew keep step with a Legislature composed wholly of Solomons. We'd be so jealous of them that we'd start yelling, 'Off with their heads,' in next tew no time."

'Off with their heads,' in next tew no time."

The other nodded, and said with a rather sheepish laugh, "I reckon that I got carried away a bit by the Congressman's big-taown talk, but you've put

him in a somewhat different light. As a matter of fact my first impression was probably nearer right, for he struck me as being a good deal like the rest of us ordinary men." And he proceeded to tell the story of Mr. Clayton's request for a little mountain "medicine."

The Sheriff's eyes twinkled. "That's Clay, all over. He's a good fellow but he's human. Clayton's climbed on the Volstead band-wagon, too; but not the water-wagon. He's strong for Prohibition, of the Statute books, but keeps a 'leetle something' in the haouse — for medicinal purposes.

"Maybe you noticed that, when I was talking abaout the reasons why I wanted tew be elected State's Attorney, I shifted from the subject of moonshiners to coal-miners, in a hurry. Well, I had a hunch that, if Clayton got the idea that I was especially interested in damming up the streams of 'white licker' that trickle daown these maountain-sides tew moisten the parched throats in the taowns, he wouldn't be quite so ready tew back up my candidacy. Hope you won't think that I failed tew live up tew the name of Honest Abe by dewing that, Omie. You see I can be 'practical,' like other politicians, when I'm certain that the end justifies the means, and the means aren't dishonest in themselves."

"But you really dew want tew put an end tew moonshining, don't you, Abe?" inquired the girl, who had been trained by "Smiles" to understand the evil inherent in that illicit business.

"I want tew put an end tew every kind of law-breaking, so far as I can. And one of the strongest reasons
for my wanting tew swap jobs, naow, is because I hate
tew be everlastingly cutting up the little stills run by
my old friends and neighbors — yes, and relations —

when I'm plumb certain that they are encouraged tew break the law by an organized gang of boot-leggers, daown in the taowns. Aour ignorant maountain people assume all the danger, while they get most of the profits. Of all the low-daown caowards they're the worst. They keep under cover like foxes and have got tew be dug aout of their holes. That's one thing that I'm dead set on dewing, with the help of the Grand Jury, if I get elected."

"Good!" cried the girl.

"I'm not a Prohibitionist, although I haven't taken a drink since the Eighteenth Amendment became a law. I can like and even admire a man for other qualities which he may have, even if he disapproves of the law and sometimes drinks whiskey in straight defiance of it; and I certainly can sympathize with the ignorant maountaineer who can't see what right the Government has tew butt in on his private affairs; can't understand why he hasn't a right tew dew what he likes with the corn which he's grown under so much difficulty—either eat it, or distill it into licker and drink it. But I haven't a particle of anything but hatred for those coyotes who are making a fortune aout of breaking the law, and poisoning the country with fusel oil."

"Same hyar. I feel just as you dew abaout it," Virgil agreed. "But what dew you think abaout the law, itself? You said that you weren't a prohibitionist—."

For perhaps half a minute Abe remained silent, his gaze turned out of the window. The light struck full upon his lean face, from which had suddenly departed the animation which so altered its expression and relieved its somberness, and its lines and furrows appeared intensified. Both of the women were struck anew with the serious, careworn look which it wore;

Omie felt a surge of pity akin to pain, and Camille said, hastily, "But no. You mus' not ask so many questions, Virgil. Mr. Abe is veree tired and he has not

slep' for a long time. Alors, let us go."

"Please don't. I don't want you tew, and I'm not tired, honest, I'm not. Virgil asked me tew solve a mighty big problem, off hand, and I was wondering haow I should answer. If I looked tired it's only because thinking is such a mental strain for me—the boys often ask me if it hurts. If you-all want tew waste your time listening tew a crank like me hold forth on the subject of politics you've got nobody tew blame but yourselves. It's the one thing I can talk abaout 'til the caows come home—and enjoy."

"Fair enough," said his host. "Let's go! I'm as green as grass on the subject, but I'm willing tew

learn."

"You saound a little like the postmaster daown at Fayville who got some important mail all balled up and then apologized by saying, 'I'm willin' tew be forgiven for anything I'm sorry for, Abe.' Well—"

The speaker paused again, and, before he could continue, there occurred an interruption which caused a postponement of the discussion. It was to be resumed later; but, through one of those strange pranks of Fate, although the time was to be midafternoon, the month again June, and the participants the same, with one addition, full twelve months had elapsed, and the whirlwind was gathering force unto itself.

The interruption came first through a halloo from without the little hospital, and next in the appearance in the doorway of the grinning, bearded face of Sam Slade, one of the Deputies who had taken part in the previous night's raid. Weary as he must have been, he had that day ridden ten miles from his home down

to Fayville, and then, far out of his way, over the twelve mile twisting route to Smiling Pass, merely to inquire how his chief was faring. At least, so it seemed at first.

"Reckoned I'd jest drap in fer a jiffy, and find aout haow you was gittin' along, Abe. The boys was discommodin' theirselves abaout you, some," he announced.

"That's right neighborly uv you, Sam, although thar want no real need uv hit, for my foot's gittin' along right smart," answered the wounded man, promptly relapsing into the broad mountain dialect, and thereby bringing a smile to Omie's lips. *Tempora mutantur*, indeed!

She thrust forward a home-made chair, with a split ash seat, for the newcomer and resumed her place on the foot of the bed with no thought of embarrassment, for the pendulum which was vacillating between girlhood and womanhood had for the time swung back to the former. Indeed, her only thought in the matter was one of passing surprise that her smile was so ready and everything seemed so natural. A few hours before, and she had not known Abe Blount at all, yet it had been her sincere belief that she could not possibly like him. Now it seemed rather as though she had known him all her life, and he was as much one of them as Virgil himself. Strange.

"What's new, daown tew the taown?" queried Abe.

"Well, hit's a-buzzin' like a hive uv wild bees. Most uv the folks thar air all het up on accaount uv your gittin' yourself shotted, in spite uv me tellin' 'em thet hit warn't nawthin' and you took hit cool enough yourself. But some uv the young fry, thet's been drinkin' moonshine, air a-sayin' hit served you right fer cuttin' up your own uncle's still. Noey Fugate, he's daown

thar, drunk's a fool, and a-swarin' he's a-goin' tew git you fer hit."

"Barkin' dawgs." The answer was uttered tolerantly. "I hain't a-feared uv what he'll dew, whatever."

"Better take off thet coat uv yourn, Sam, and let me hang hit by the kitchen fire fer a piece," urged Mrs. Gayheart, for Slade had obviously not bothered to seek cover during the storm and his clothes were fairly

clinging to his lanky form.

"I kain't stop, Mis' Gayheart; got tew be gittin' along home, right smart. You-all come over — no, I don't guess you kin, tew-night. Well, take keer uv yourself, Abe." He stood up, and with a friendly nod, but without other form of farewell, strode to the door and out onto the veranda. There he called back over his shoulder, "Virge, you come aout hyar a minute."

"You are all going out!" Camille proclaimed, and she pretended to shoo them forth, holding her skirt with both hands and shaking it at them. There was a smile on her lips, but her words were suddenly decisive, for she was enough the trained nurse to observe the lines of pain and weariness deepening around the corners of her patient's mouth and eyes. He made a pretense of begging them not to go, but she was adamant, and Abe not altogether sorry. "But no," she answered. "You mus' now be quiet and rest 'til supper time. Perhaps you can go to sleep, and that will be good."

"'Sleep, chief nourisher in Life's feast'" quoted the man. "Well, I'll try and take a little of said nourishment." He suddenly realized how very tired he was, and his eyes closed with the closing of the door.

At the top of the steps Virgil and Sam Slade were in low-voiced conversation. Nearer the door from which Camille had come stood Omie, her hands grasping the railing, her young, lithe figure strangely tense. "Why, what ees eet, Omie?" cried the other, the beat of whose heart had quickened inexplicably.

Lifting her hand with a gesture commanding silence, the girl whispered, "Sssh!"; but the men had a ready

ceased speaking and started down the steps.

"Oh, Camille! I heard Sam Slade tell Virge that some of the wild, drunken men daown at Fayville were threatening tew teach Abe Blount that he can't go on cutting up stills in these maountains. They're planning tew come up hyar, to-night, and—'

With a little smothered wail she turned, threw her arms almost passionately about her sister-in-law, and pressed her face against the other's bosom. Omie, too, was very tired, and weariness magnified her sudden fear.

Camille stiffened and her face grew a shade paler as memory recalled another night, two years before, when they had stood locked in each other's embrace within the doorway of the House of Happiness, while the darkness below them gave birth to many shadowy forms in motion and bent on destruction, to flashes from hostile rifles and the leaping flames from their own sawmill, set on fire by other wild and drunken men. And then Virgil, her Virgil now, leaping from rock to rock from his cabin across the creek, his army rifle answering the barking pack in deeper tones; his righteous anger finding expression in rude army oaths. Was the wonderful peace, which had at last come to her troubled young life, to be shattered again, merely because they had played the part of good Samaritans towards one who had come to them, wounded in the performance of his duty?

By nature and training both women were more courageous than the average, but now, sharing the same thoughts, they quivered a little in each other's arms. It is always easier to be calm in the case of an actual, than an imagined, crisis.

They drew apart rather hastily, as Virgil came bounding up the steps again, crying out, "What the dickens! Camille! Why, what's the matter? You look like you had seen a ghost in broad daylight."

"Is it true, Virge? Are the moonshiners coming hyar to-night, tew get Abe?" breathlessly demanded his sister, seizing one of his arms while he placed the other about Camille's waist.

He laughed, boisterously.

"Oh, shucks, of course not. Sam just wanted me tew know that there was nothing tew get excited over, in case we heared that some of the boys had been dewing a little laoud talking. It's just hot air and moonshine. Good Lord, they wouldn't dare start anything, where Abe Blount's concerned. And anyway, men who really mean tew kill a public officer, or even tew rig themselves up like Ku Klux Klanners and hand him a beating, don't go araound telling the world abaout it, in advance. Forget it, both of you, and don't mention it to Abe or maw. Your beauty sleep isn't going tew be disturbed, tew-night, I can promise you that."

His hearty optimism and laughter at their fears put them to flight, for the time being, at least. Camille went to their home across the creek to attend to her long-neglected household duties, and Omie joined her mother in the kitchen.

Not until both were safely out of sight did Virgil allow his brow to cloud a little. He fully believed what he had told them; but, since he knew that the price of safety in those hills was eternal vigilance, he had already made up his mind to call Bill Cress over for guard duty that night, and to make sure that his own rifle was in good working order.

CHAPTER X

THE LEGION OF THE CHEERFUL

For the third time that day Omie stood outside the door to the House of Health, for the third time sent there upon the same homely errand, that of carrying back to the kitchen the dishes which had held food for their injured guest. Abe's supper hour had been postponed until long after that of the others, for, when at six o'clock Camille had tiptoed in to see if he were ready to be served she had found him sleeping so peacefully that she had softly closed the door again, leaving him to Mother Nature's ministrations. Not until more than an hour later had he made known the fact of his awakening by a lusty demand, couched in army language, "When dew we eat?"

Now he must have finished his meal, for the girl heard him chatting with her brother, and the breeze brought the faint fragrance of a well-seasoned pipe, which meant that Abe was smoking, since Virgil did not use tobacco in any form. Yet, once more she found herself hesitating at the threshold, and knew not exactly why. Most certainly it was not now because of any hostility towards their guest; nor was it timidity, for the awe which she had once felt had been fully dissipated by his simple friendliness. Moreover, she knew that, during the hours which had elapsed since she last saw him, her thoughts had repeatedly reverted, unbidden, to him; to the almost constantly changing expression on his plain, striking countenance; to the serious things which he had said, the amusing stories which he had told in illustrating his points, the awkward but

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expressive gestures of his big hands. And occasionally, with a smile and sigh intermingled, to his wounded foot, looking like that of a mummified giant in its gauze wrappings. She could not analyze the feelings which held her, hesitating, there, so compounded were they of antagonistic elements - eagerness and faltering; warm liking and sudden flashes of irritation; the urge to laughter and, unaccountably, at moments, a desire to weep. Above all, and dominating all, was an astonishment that she should have such thoughts and feelings regarding one whom she had known so short a time. Up to that spring Omie's nature had been like the surface of the waters, now whipped to sudden passion by a storm, now reflecting the flash of the lightning or the rays of the sun, yet retaining not the slightest trace of any of them after their passage. But now its depths were stirred up, and she, never having suspected their existence, was troubled.

Omie continued to delay her errand, making the excuse to herself that Abe would be glad to be left alone with one of his own kind, without the everlasting presence of a petticoat, for awhile. She turned and leaned against the veranda railing, glad to let the breeze, which was going down with the sun, ruffle the hair above her broad, white temple, and gently fan her cheeks, flushed from bending over a dishpan full of hot water. She loved the peacefulness of the evening hour, which was now at hand: it both soothed her and stirred her imagination. The girl uttered a little sigh of peaceful contentment. She was happy, after all; it was better to be a girl than a cow.

Her brother startled her slightly by breaking in upon her thoughts with a call from the hospital, "Omie, are you aout there? Come on in; Abe wants tew talk tew you." As she started toward the door the deeper voice corrected, "No, I want you tew talk tew me. I've been holding the floor altogether too much of the time, tewday, and, although you may not believe it, I'm not usually much of a talker. Most folks say that I'm an uncommunicative cuss; but I tell 'em that I was born bashful and never aoutgrew it. You see what evil ways a man can fall intew, through having too much unoccupied time on his hands."

Virgil laughed as he answered, "Well, I reckon that it's only a question of getting you started on some subject in which you're really interested, and we've been lucky in picking 'em. Anyway, I love tew hear a man talk, when he's got something tew say. Oh, there you are, sis! Come in and entertain Abe for awhile; I've got tew go and light the lamps."

Virgil passed his sister in the doorway, pausing to give her a brotherly hug. As he passed on he said, over his shoulder, "He's been asking some more questions abaout aour famous 'Smiles,' and I told him haow you were going tew carry on her ideals, hyar, especially in the matter of being cheerful. He wants tew hear the verses you wrote abaout—"

"Virgil Gayheart, you never told him abaout that! Oh, I think you're *hateful*," broke in the girl, with a flash of real vexation.

"Sure I did. Why not? They're mighty good, and —"

"They're not, either, Mr. — Abe. They're just a silly, school-girl rhyme, and I'm sorry I made them up."

"Oh, naow, Omie, please let's hear them. I reckon I know abaout haow you feel, but there's nothing tew be ashamed of in writing poetry — I've even done it, myself. And honestly I'd love tew hear your verses."

He spoke so persuasively that she wavered, still all

warm with embarrassment and her anger against Virgil, which was now beginning to dwindle a little, however, as a natural, if somewhat childlike, pride in her creation crept into her heart.

"I - I really don't want tew, Abe. But - well, if you'll promise not tew laugh at them —. Oh, I don't care whether you laugh, or not. They are silly. I'd

die before I'd recite them, though, but --"

"You mean that you've got a written copy?"

"Oh, heaps of them. You see 'Smiles' got hold of it and had it multigraphed tew send aout with some of aour pamphlets. I told her it was nonsense but — well, I'll go and get it."

She ran from the room, and in a moment or so was back again, bringing a printed slip which she handed to him, shyly. "Hyar. I know that you'll think it's foolish, but I tried tew make it saound as though I didn't really think I was a poet by writing it in aour maountain language."

With this explanation she turned and fled out into the evening once more, so that he might not have a chance to observe the heightened color in her cheeks. But just outside the door she paused, half-hoping, halfafraid that he would read the verses aloud, which he immediately began to do, his deep, pleasant voice catching the rhythm and making them sound better than she had thought possible.

"' THE LEGION OF THE CHEERFUL'

"I like that title, Omie," he interpolated, rightly surmising that she was still within radius of his voice.

"Dark claouds gittin' blacker, honey - Ole Man Trouble pressin' sore?

Seems like happy days, and sunny, hain't a-comin' anymore?

Hain't no sort uv sense in pinin', for the poet-man was right, Dark claouds hev a silver linin'; faith air always half the fight.

Got tew skimp a leetle closer, so thet hungry folks kin eat? Goin' tew growl abaout hit? No, sir! Charity air always sweet.

What's thet I jest heerd you mumblin'? 'Thet the road air moughty long?'

Lift your head and you'll stop stumblin'; light your burden with a song.

If you're feelin' kind uv fearful 'baout the aoutcome uv the day,

J'ine the Legion uv the Cheerful, start a-smilin' — thet's the way.

You hain't one tew think uv quittin', jest bekaise you're feelin' blue;

Hyar's a leetle thought that's fittin', 'Fight the fight, hit's up tew you.'

J'ine the Legion; you will find hit helps tew shorten many a mile:

As fer trouble, you won't mind hit half so much if you jest smile.

"Written by Omie Gayheart, a sixteen-year-old mountain girl of Smiling Pass."

There was no laughter, only a complete silence within the little hospital following the end of the reading.

Then Abe called gently, "Omie, come in hyar, child."

She obeyed, returning almost as bashfully as though she were indeed a child, and took her stand by the bedside with lowered eyes. Abe reached out to take her hand, but suddenly refrained. "Naow I'm not going tew be so foolish as tew say you've written a masterpiece of verse, because it isn't. But it's mighty good, for a sixteen-year-old maountain girl—"

"Oh, I wrote it more than a year ago," interpolated

e poetess.

"Well, for a seventeen-year-old one, for that matter. I like it. I'm plumb glad that you showed it tew me. The wording is pleasant and, better still, it expresses a fine bit of philosophy. I shouldn't be a mite surprised if those little verses helped me over a good many rough spots in the future, for I mean tew keep them and—"

She laughed, still rather embarrassed.

"I reckon they'll wear aout pretty quick."

"No, they won't — not until *I* dew, for, after I've read them over a couple of times more, I'll have them stowed away in a memory pocket, where I can always find them, even in the dark, which is when they're most likely tew be needed."

"Can you really learn things as quick as that?"

- "Not all things, but I can simple rhymes, when I like the subject. Verse is a lot easier tew remember than prose, you know. That's one of the reasons why good poetry is of such priceless value tew man. Anyhow, I've made up my mind that I want tew join that Legion, right away. What dew you have tew dew tew become a member?"
- "Why why just *smile*, I reckon. Only you've got tew keep on smiling, or —"
- "Or you forfeit your membership. That saounds reasonable."

By this time dusk had almost wholly invaded the room, but the girl knew, instinctively, that Abe Blount had joined the ranks of her Legionnaires. Moved by a mutual impulse they clasped hands, and she felt that somehow an intangible, but very real, bond of sympathy had been forged between them. Her heartbeat quickened, but it was as a result of the thought rather than the contact of his hand on hers.

"A smile's a funny thing," remarked the man, after a moment of silence, and rather as though he were musing aloud. "When you come tew think of it, it's just the visible expression of an impulse, caused maybe by amusement, cheerfulness, friendliness or even courage. But what a heap it can mean! And it's a good example of the text, 'It is more blessed tew give than tew receive'; or, perhaps, it is more like what Shakespeare said abaout the quality of mercy, 'It is twice blessed. It blesses him that gives and him that takes.' Only it's got tew be an honest smile which begins in the heart and spreads tew the face. It's not so hard tew make the lips give an imitation of the real thing; but, if you want tew learn the truth abaout it, look in the smiler's eyes. They don't lie so easily."

"I know. Rose McDonald often smiles with her eyes, even when her lips are quite serious — and I

think that you dew, sometimes."

"Hope so. A smile sure does help tew scare off Ole Man Trouble, and buck up a fellow's own courage."

Omie started to ridicule the idea that he ever

needed help of that nature, but Abe interrupted.

"You can just bet I dew, plenty of times. Why, sometimes I get pretty nigh scared tew death, when I start thinking what's ahead of me. I don't mind telling you that, for there's nothing tew be ashamed of in being afraid, if you don't let the fear stop you from going right ahead with what's got tew be done. Why, they tell a story abaout a famous French field marshal, one of the bravest men in history, who felt his

knees beginning tew knock together when he got tew thinking of a desperate battle that he was going intew the next morning. He looked daown at his shaking legs, and said, 'Dew you tremble? Ah, if you only knew where I am going tew take you, on the morrow, you would, indeed, have cause tew quake.'"

Not knowing how to respond to this new confidence, Omie was silent, and almost immediately Abe went on in lighter tones, "I'd love tew build me a home and live up hyar, if only so that I could tell folks that I came from a place named 'Smiling Pass.' It saounds so attractive and cheerful. And I've been living in taowns altogether too long; even small and backwoodsy ones sometimes get on the nerves of a man who was born and bred in the maountains."

"Oh, why don't you dew it? I wish you would, Abe! Even if you couldn't live hyar all the time, you could have a little cottage-haouse tew come tew, naow and then, and tew think abaout while you're away. We could cut the lumber for it at aour sawmill, and Virgil could have the boys help build it, as part of their manual training. Oh, please! I know just the prettiest spot for it; a little knoll just above where aour land ends, at the bend of the creek. You can look daown the valley both ways, there's a brook and a wonderful sycamore tree, and —"

"Stop. If you keep on like that I'll be tempted tew give up both law and politics and revert intew a lazy maountaineer again. You don't know it, but you're simply putting intew words one of my pet dreams, which I play with night after night. I can go tew sleep a lot quicker if I can only steal away in imagination up hyar in the hills. It sure would be great if I could have a real place like that tew come tew, if only naow and then. If I should dew it, would

you help me plan it and keep an eye on the building of it, for me?"

"Would I? Wouldn't I just love tew, though! Oh,

let me light up and get a pencil and paper -"

"Suppose we let the pencil and paper part go until to-morrow. The moon will be rising in a few minutes. Let's talk as we are and watch its necromancy—"

Omie broke in to echo the unfamiliar word in a puzzled voice, and Abe explained its meaning, simply, adding, "Pull up your chair so that you can look aout of the window, too, and we'll build aour haouse in imagination, first. That's where all created things start, you know; I reckon that God must have imagined the Universe before he began tew construct it."

"That will be fun."

The girl moved her chair closer to the bedside and once more assumed her favorite posture with elbow on knee, chin on hand. But, although she had her full share of the imaginative instinct, her training had, of late, been along practical lines and a desire to air her knowledge of modern construction caused her to say, "Of course you'll want tew have all the conveniences that we have, hyar, and are teaching the maountain people tew adopt, such as three or four rooms, stoves, real beds and other furniture, so we'll plan with those in mind, although you wouldn't have tew get them all at once, of course. They cost an awful lot of money, and a heap more tew get them up hyar, you know."

"Yes, I reckon so. But it won't cost anything tew pretend we're going tew have them," he answered, cheerfully. "And, while we're abaout it, we might as well put in a bath with running water, hot and cold;

electric lights —"

"Abe Blount, naow you're making fun again, and I'm in earnest. I want tew believe that you're really going tew build your dream haouse; but, if you won't play fair, why, you can get straight aout of the automobile."

The man heard once more her low, throaty laugh and he smiled in the darkness.

"I'll play fair," he answered, contritely.

"All right, then. Haow much money dew you reckon you can spend on it — just the building, I mean, naow?"

Without waiting for his reply she voiced another thought which had sprung into her mind, born of her question, and which was to change the subject of their talk abruptly and entirely.

"Oh, wasn't it a shame that your granny sold that coal land when she did!" was the parenthetical exclamation which caused the change in this instance. "If she hadn't been tricked intew dewing it, then, you might have been rich, naow, and able tew build a castle instead of a cottage on aour maountain."

Abe laughed.

"I don't guess so. If the property hadn't been sold, the coal company wouldn't be mining hyar, naow, and they'd still be trying tew buy it as cheaply as they could. Tew be sure, it might bring a lot more money to-day than it did twenty-five years ago, but we've got tew be broad-minded enough tew remember that it is the iniquitous corporation's railways, machinery and its capital which hires the labor which have made the potential value of the coal the actual value that the engineer puts upon it. Besides, maw was one of a baker's dozen children, so my own share of the fortune wouldn't have been so very large, if I'd got any of it."

"Who was your mother, Abe?" inquired the girl. She spoke casually, without having any particular curiosity, although she vaguely remembered that Virgil

had not answered her earlier question. It was a perfectly natural and innocent query, for, in that shut-in hill country, family relationships were so closely interwoven that every one was expected to know, or know all about, every one else who lived within a radius of miles. "Did she marry one of old Uncle Dan'el Blount's boys, over on Rattlesnake?"

The answer did not come immediately. Instead, Omie was conscious that the silence which followed her question was oddly prolonged. The twilight had faded into almost complete darkness, within the room, and this suddenly intensified the strange uneasiness which began to creep into her mind, together with an inexplicable feeling that something was wrong, some evil portended. This was increased and made acute when she heard the man draw his breath deeply with a painful catch in it.

She felt that she had to speak again, and said in a troubled voice, "Why...have I said something that — that I shouldn't have? I didn't mean —"

Abe moved his head on the pillow, and answered gently, "No. It was a natural question, Omie. I don't love tew answer it; but I reckon that I'd rather have you hear the whole story from me than from some one else. And of course you will hear it, sooner or later." Then he added with a trace of bitterness in his tone, "When a man goes intew politics, his life and private affairs cease tew be his own; they become public property."

CHAPTER XI

THE SHADOW

ABE hesitated no longer, but straightway entered upon his self-imposed ordeal. He continued steadily to the end with but one brief interruption, at the very outset.

"Maw was one of those Blounts, Omie," he began.

The girl could not wholly check the exclamation which was wrung from her by the startlingness of the disclosure. Until he had nearly concluded she said nothing more; but steadily, throughout his story, her heart grew more and more leaden, and filled with a dull ache in sympathy with the fiercer pain which she knew he was experiencing. Not that he hinted at it, for he spoke in the simplest manner possible, making only the most meager of explanations and no excuses. Perhaps he spoke the more freely because of the darkness. His solitary hearer stood for Mankind. She should hear the facts, and might decide upon them as she would. He would keep his voice calm, emotionless. In the main, he succeeded, yet the girl who sat listening in the dark, heard far more than a bald recital of events. Her mind and imagination were both superactive, and they wove the spoken words into a vivid moving picture which produced strong reactions in her heart. Yet these did not include even the suggestion of a thought that there was anything strange in his telling her the story. Omie was a mountain woman. In spite of her youth, as measured by the calendar standards of a modern world, she was already fully

acquainted with vital principles of life, and the primitive passions of her own people. The picture which he sketched in outline for her was not a new one, although it contained new elements. Unhappily, its salient features had been duplicated, time and again, in the lives of those who dwelt apart, almost completely shut off from what we are pleased to call "civilization"—as, indeed, they have in every land and through all the ages since man was man, and woman, woman.

Still, she felt a difference, and sensed an element in the story which stirred her to understanding and to pity. It was as though her mind perceived the fire which burned beneath the cold gray ashes; the dead facts which he uncovered to her vision. Indeed, the story which he told so simply might well have served a John Fox as the plot for a gripping romance of the Cumberland hills in those days, now almost departed, when family feuds still ran high and passions did the same. Later, Omie was to learn more of its details, and the story may here be chronicled rather more fully than as told by Abe that night.

When Franklin Perriman first came into the life of Lispeth Blount she was a full year younger than Omie—barely passed sixteen, in fact—and those who had known her at that time agree that the Cumberland mountains sheltered no fairer, sweeter flower from the Anglo-Saxon stalk than she. Mountaineers though both families were, they had sprung from the best of Old Dominion stock, and still retained much of its superiority in comparison with their neighbors; and all of the old pride. The first Blounts, in Virginia, were landed proprietors; owners of rich, wide fields and many slaves. Their hill descendants—sired by a

younger son who had sought to make a fortune for himself in the promised land of the Blue Grass, the family estates being entailed, and had become lost in those mountain fastnesses — were still regarded as people of substance, although they had already begun to fall foul of misfortune. On the other hand, the Perrimans were originally Cavaliers; adventurers from the beginning, and, later, among the more venturesome pioneers who, for the sake of excitement, had helped Boone and Lewis to wrest from French and Red Man the "dark and bloody land," the mountain wilderness. And of such was Franklin Perriman — a throw-back, perhaps, for his people had become content to remain fixed; a herculean youth full of daring and picturesque dash.

Fortune had placed the two families in the same narrow, winding valley, and divided its land between them, almost to the exclusion of other squatters. Since, at the start, both houses were proud and strong of will, it is not strange that they had clashed, or that, more than two generations before the birth of Franklin and Lispeth, a bitter feud had come into being over some now-forgotten and probably trivial incident. A number of the menfolk of both sides had paid the penalty of its mad continuance, ending life as the target for a rifle ball dispatched by one of the other clan. But, before these two were grown to manhood and young womanhood, respectively, a truce had been tacitly agreed to by their fathers, who were becoming old and had, with advancing years, acquired a sanity which had not been theirs in the days of their youth.

Franklin and Lispeth had met each other countless times, of course; but not until he was twenty and she four years less had their eyes been really opened. Then they saw — and loved at first sight. They made

no secret of it. Franklin was too daring to care to resort to subterfuge. He marched boldly up to the cabin-castle of the enemy, declared his love, and asked the girl in marriage. Here was a challenge such as could not very well but cause the old fires to flare up again. The inbred hatred for the tribe of Perriman and all its works made Lispeth's father utter an angry refusal. He ordered the brazen youth to leave, and pointed his command with a leveled rifle, in the face of which Franklin coolly served notice that he meant to continue his wooing of the girl, win her and wed her if he could, with or without her family's consent. Lispeth, for her part, as frankly declared that she loved him and would come to him when he wished. Thus was again revived the old story of Montague and Capulet, of Romeo and Juliet, but with the additional element of Anglo-Saxon determination, and without the conventions and restrictions, even of medieval Italy. The fires of love were fanned to hotter flame by the winds of opposition, as is always the case if the love is real.

Lispeth was closely guarded and watched, particularly by her six brothers. They were young and hotheaded and the old feud seemed to them something vital and containing something of the chivalric. Yet the lovers met from time to time, as lovers will, even when watched, and finally the girl won over her mother and got her to intercede for them. This she succeeded in doing the more easily because the feud had already laid a heavy load of grief upon the heart of the older woman, as is the lot of woman, and she knew that other blood enmities in those mountains had been healed by the intermarriage of two of the warring families. With these arguments, and patient appeal, she began at length to undermine her husband's resolve. But in

proportion as it grew weaker that of the six sons increased.

Meanwhile Franklin continued steadfast to his purpose, and even built a new home — a small cabin, but large enough for two — to which he meant to take his bride, for Lispeth had declared herself ready to break with her family for his sake. She was Naomi. "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." When the cabin was nearly finished, weather-proof in its notched logs cemented with clay, and hand-hewn shingles, Perriman told her to be ready to come to him when he could secure the services of the only mountain preacher of that region, in whom was vested alike the power of Church and Law to perform the marriage ceremony, and who was able to visit that isolated creek so seldom that on more than one occasion he had been called upon to preach a funeral sermon over the grassgrown grave of a mountaineer's first wife, and, on the same day, marry him to a second.

Then came a June night when the sun set on smiles, to rise again on tears.

Its history was clouded in uncertainty, as Abe frankly explained. All that was of record was that in the afternoon Lispeth disappeared from her home, eluding the watch which had been set upon her. The day had been wonderfully fair; but a storm lurked among the hills and, that evening, broke in almost unprecedented fury. Only one who has experienced a true cloudburst in the Cumberland mountains may know how furious that can be — the rain pours down as though all the floodgates in the firmament had been opened wide; it sweeps in gray sheets down the steep mountain-sides to convert the creeks from impotent streamlets into raging floods, overflowing their banks and capable of bearing away the strongest man. The lightning plays incessantly

beneath the low clouds which hang from hilltop to hilltop like a black pall; the thunder crashes are caught up and tossed, reverberating, from wall to wall of the narrow valleys.

At first the Blount brothers did not suspect the truth. Lispeth was lost, and, as soon as the storm let up a little in intensity, they began a widening search, not suspecting that she had really fled to join her lover in the little home which he had built for her, or that, through the wild night, she had there been sheltered from the awful and passionate elements. But such was the fact, and what had it mattered to them, who had each other, if nature was in upheaval, the everlasting hills lashed by a tempest which tore down deep-rooted trees and turned the creek below into a maniac of leaping waters, a ghostly white streak in the unnatural darkness?

Then the dawn broke, bringing calm after storm, and in its early light the man and woman came forth from their shelter, their arms about each other's waists, to welcome the first cheerful rays of the sun, little knowing what the daylight held in store for both of them.

Suddenly the gray shadows on the eastern hillside gave birth to a sharp flash; the silence to the crack of a rifle. Franklin Perriman staggered; then sank slowly to the ground. The girl's palsied arms could not support his weight, although their clasp did not loosen until he had breathed out his life with his head against her breast. One of Lispeth's own brothers had discovered them, and fired that shot. Moreover he gloried in his act—had he not avenged the honor of the Blount family?

So ended the brief romance, but not the drama nor the stern reality which was to follow. While Lispeth

lay in her father's home, crushed, and with her dazed mind wandering for weeks, the old feud broke out again. Two of Franklin's brothers were shot and killed; one of her own was desperately wounded. The law? At that time there was none to interfere in those mountain regions, even to avenge the initial murder, as to which the "unwritten law" would have been a full defense at any trial. For the rest, it was warfare. When the girl began to recover she placed a seal upon her lips and refused to discuss with any one her love affair, but there came a time when Nature forced her to break that seal of silence. She declared that she and Franklin had been married that afternoon. A strange "preacher" had performed the ceremony — it was his unexpected arrival which had caused Franklin to send for her to come to him in haste. Had there been any witnesses to the marriage? Yes, two of the Perriman boys, now dead at her own brothers' hands. Who was the preacher? She did not know; a "furrin'" missionary, she thought. Did she have a certificate? What was that? Perhaps the preacher had given Franklin a paper — oh, she did not know anything about such things. All that she knew was that she had married the man whom she loved, and been very happy for a brief few hours. And now he was dead!

No one believed her story, except perhaps her mother, who did not dare to say so. Probably the men of her family did not want to believe it, now. There was no proof of its verity; Abe had in later years searched the County records in vain, but the law was lax in those days. There was none to corroborate her statement. Her brothers had done their work thoroughly.

Came another day when the March winds moaned, and no sun shone to greet the birth of Franklin Perri-

man's son, or to cheer the girl-mother, who, under the dictates of the harsh mountain code and primitive religion combined, had been driven from her home to take up her lonely abode in the cabin which had been built for her by the man whom she had loved. Her mother was with her for the time; her father provided the means for her existence, nothing more.

"Oh, haow cruel!" cried Omie, bitterly, when the son of Lispeth Blount reached this point in his story.

"Cruel, yes. But you know the customs of aour people."

"Indeed I dew, Abe," answered the girl, tears of pity and hot anger choking her words. "I dew know haow aour people act when they believe — what they believed abaout your mother. I heard 'Smiles' arguing with Preacher Stuttering Sam abaout it, one day, too. She quoted the wonderful story of Christ and the Magdalene — not that Lispeth was like her —"

"No. I, at least, know that her story was true."

"So dew I, Abe, of course."

"She was more like that other Mary in the sorrows which she was forced to bear because the world would not believe, and, disbelieving, would not make any allowances. Its judgments are bitter. The subject is not a pleasant one, Omie, but — well, I suppose Sam answered that, when the Lord said to the woman 'Go, and sin no more,' the first word was a command driving her aout of His presence."

"That's exactly what he said. He wouldn't listen to 'Smiles' at all, but just insisted that those of Christ's church had an example in such cases, and were baound tew turn away from that other poor girl-mother. Oh, was there ever such narrowness and terrible ignorance as there is in these maountains? I don't think that I ever saw Rose mad at a person, but that time she was

so angry at Sam's preachings, and at the way every one else araound hyar talked and acted, that she actually cried and said that they were a lot wickeder in God's sight than the girl, herself, had been. She did everything for her, too, even though folks said horrid things, and threatened to drive all of us aout of the maountains. But they didn't dew it, and I reckon that they forgot, after a while."

"Yes, they dew forget — after a while. But it was splendid of Mrs. McDonald. I know just haow she felt, only with me — Well, when I was a boy I reckon that my hatred for what I thought was the only sort of religion that man had was stronger than any other feeling, except perhaps my love for maw. Naow — well, I understand better, and tew understand is almost always tew forgive. The people of these hills can't be blamed, altogether, and they should be pitied, too — the one who through ignorance acts unjustly is as pitiable as the victim of the injustice. Their minds and souls are shut in, just as they are physically; their spiritual horizon is just as restricted by maountains of ignorance and prejudice as their visual horizon is by maountains of stone and earth."

Abe stopped for a moment. The newly risen moon had sent a shaft of palest amber light diagonally into the room. It fell on the man's face, toning it almost to the color of the pillow beneath his head, yet intensifying the lines of pathos about his mouth, and Omie regarded him with a feeling akin to awe, he looked so calm, self-contained and sorrowful withal.

Without looking at her, and speaking almost as though to himself, he continued, quietly, "And pardon under aour maountain code is as bad as the punishment—yes, far worse than it, I think. Men would have both forgiven and forgotten what they believed was her

fault, and she would have been restored tew full rights in human society, if she would only have agreed tew marry any one of the several men who wanted her — wanted her because she was young and still beautiful for some years, although she faded quickly. But she would never sell herself in return for so-called 'respectability.' She knew that she had not sinned, and she was faithful tew — tew my father, until she died. And when I was old enough tew understand all this, too, I — well, I reckon I loved and honored her more than ever."

"Of course you did. And so dew I, Abe."

The girl spoke very softly, and for the merest instant laid her hand with a gentle pressure upon the back of his as it lay, motionless, on the "kivverlid."

There was another moment of silence. Then Abe moved and said, half apologetically, "I suppose some folks would say that I shouldn't be talking with you like this — had no right tew tell you that story. But, somehaow, it seemed as though I had tew be the one tew dew it, for naow almost nobody knows, or remembers her statement. And then — well, I had tew go on and try tew make you understand haow I felt, for I should feel no different even if what folks believed were true."

"Of course. You are her son."

"That's it. I believe that mother was married; the world doesn't; and I couldn't help wanting you to have a sympathetic understanding, whatever you might think, yourself. The subject isn't a pleasant one, but we shouldn't forget that there may be two sides to it. Most people try to close their eyes tew it, and especially tew keep the eyes of their boys and girls closed, lest they see something — ugly. That's being like the ostrich in the traditional story. I think, myself, that

it's a lot better tew think and talk abaout the wholly fine and beautiful things in life — better tew look up at the stars than daown in the mire. Yet the mire is there; we're more likely to stumble intew it if we don't know that it exists and haow easily it can swallow one up, and — well, sometimes the stars are clearly reflected in the surface of a pool hidden within that mire."

He had slipped back into a detached, impersonal way of speaking and went on in the same manner.

"And haow can mankind ever hope tew move onward and upward to the finer things, the higher levels, withaout stumbling again and again, if we deliberately blind aourself tew the pitfalls with which the road is lined?"

Hesitatingly, Omie spoke the thought which had come into her own mind.

"'Smiles' used tew say that ignorance is a pit—a deep, black pit. And understanding a bridge across it. The stronger the bridge is built the safer it will be for people to walk upon."

Abe's countenance lighted up at this, and he nodded

with appreciation.

"And," the girl continued, timidly, yet with an eagerness to relieve the other's mind, "please don't think that it was wrong for you tew talk tew me the way you have — I'm grown up, naow, you know. Besides, it just couldn't have been wrong, when it seemed so — so right and sort of natural. I guess I can't explain just what I mean, but it did, and I'm glad that you told me. Perhaps it's because you're so much older than I, and — and you're different from most men, and somehaow it seems as though I could speak my inmost thoughts right aout tew you — although I can't explain that, either. Besides, I want tew know more abaout —

abaout Life. I sometimes think and think abaout it until I grow almost afraid."

"' Afraid,' Omie?"

"Yes. Truly I dew. I don't know what I'm afraid of, exactly, only life itself seems so tremendous, with all its problems; and men and women so sort of helpless, especially girls. There seem tew be so many wrong things tew dew, and so often you don't realize that they're wrong until after you've done them; but you have tew suffer just the same."

"Oh, naow you're trying tew find the answer tew the whole riddle of life. And who knows it? Thousands of brainier people than you and I have given it up. The only thing for us is tew live and dew the best we can, according tew aour knowledge, trying tew add tew that, all the time. But, tew go back tew the subject of the young mother that 'Smiles' befriended, for I don't want you tew get the idea that I'm excusing her, altogether. She was punished — although the punishment was far too cruel, I think - because she broke a law. Innocent people are sometimes punished, too, as mother was, and others because they were ignorant, as you said. But you know how I think about obedience tew law; and the marriage one is fundamental. Preacher Billy would say that it was ordained by God, and I suppose it was, in a sense, for it's an absolutely essential part of the great plan for the social progress of mankind. The individual often has tew be sacrificed for the greater good of the many, even though it sometimes seems, and is, unjust. But the 'family' must be continued and protected. I didn't intend tew deliver a lecture or start moralizing, but one thing's dead certain, Omie, people who bring babies intew the world, unlawfully, whether they're consciously wicked or not, must suffer. They always dew and always will, even

if other folks forget their fault, or never even know it. Their greatest punishment is always inflicted by themselves upon their own hearts; but, for the sake of the social order they must be punished by some law, as well."

"I suppose so — of course it is so. But there isn't any justice in a law which makes a poor, ignorant girl-mother an aoutcast forever," said Omie, rebelliously.

"No. I wasn't thinking particularly abaout aour

maountain code, then."

"Well, I was. She was like—like your mother in one way. She wouldn't marry anybody else, afterwards, and I think she did just right. Preacher Sam would say that I'm wicked in thinking that, I reckon, but it seems tew me that there is one thing a hundred times worse than—yes, I will say it, than love like that withaout marriage, and that's marriage withaout love."

"That's an unpardonable sin, Omie — against the

greatest law of all; one that is certainly God's."

"That's exactly what I think. Nothing on earth could make me marry any man unless I loved him—oh, just awfully. And that's another thing abaout Life. I know that such love as that must be wonderful. I would somehaow be sure that it is, even if so many great writers had not told abaout it; yet it seems tew me that there is something kind of terrifying in it, too."

"It does seem that way, doesn't it? But let's not talk abaout such things any more."

"Oh, please! I never have spoken like this with anybody, before, and somehaow I want tew talk and talk. It seems as though it might help me make up my mind abaout — oh, lots of things that have been worrying me."

"Well, I don't know. Pleasure is often so close tew pain that it's hard tew tell where one leaves off and the other begins. And it seems that the most wonderful thing in the world, a great love, sometimes causes the sharpest suffering."

"Have you ever felt it, Abe?" timidly inquired the

girl.

"Not the kind you've been speaking of. I never loved any woman, except mother, and I don't guess that I loved her nearly enough, although, when I got old enough tew realize what she was bearing, for my sake, cast off by her family and shunned by nearly everybody, I tried my best tew make it up tew her." He paused, then added, "No, I've never experienced the love of a man for a maid, which even Solomon in all his wisdom failed tew understand, and I certainly hope that I may never experience it. Of course I shall never get married."

"I don't know why you should say that!"

Omie's words were more a challenge than a question.

"I see why, for I know the world better than you dew. This morning you jokingly asked me, 'What's in a name? ' and I answered, 'Everything.' I meant it

two ways, then, and I dew still."

"And I say that's foolish, a selfish sort of pride, Abe Blount!" retorted the girl, with a flash of her customary spirit which had been strangely subdued of late. "Besides, lots of men boast abaout being selfmade, and you have surely made a name for yourself, one that everybody respects, naow, anyway."

"All that I've ever tried tew dew was make my mother's name honored a little, and keep it so, for her sake. I don't say 'honorable,' because in my opinion

it always has been that."

"Of course. She wouldn't have been really to blame,

even if what people thought were true. Why, she was only a little maountain girl withaout any 'bridge of understanding' tew walk on." She paused a moment, and then added, "It seems tew me that a great love must be something like the 'great and strong wind' that the Bible tells abaout, and it draowns aout 'the still small voice."

"I reckon it might be likened tew that — it's certainly something elemental." Abe stopped, his mind swiftly elaborating the suggestion without conscious intent: "Like fire, which warms and comforts when kept in check, yet can consume; like water, which satisfies the thirst, and sometimes overwhelms and swallows up men and women; like the wind, as Omie says. A gentle, steady breeze is wonderfully pleasant; but, when it increases tew the paower of a whirlwind, it can sweep away the souls of men and whirl them, like leaves torn from the trees, up tew heights where heaven must seem very close, only tew cast them daown again, dead and broken things." He caught himself up with a shrug of his shoulders and the mental admonition, "Don't be a fool, Abe Blount." Aloud, he added, "Yes, it must be terribly paowerful, sometimes, but just the same folks can make themselves secure against it, if they will."

This time it was the girl who did not immediately respond. She scarcely realized how strongly she had been moved by the story and the discussion which had naturally grown out of it, but she knew that her heart was beating sharply. She breathed rapidly, through parted lips. Just for an instant she caught herself experiencing a strangely poignant desire to experience such a great love, some day — to be caught up in the embrace of an overpowering wind, to live to the uttermost, to know. And the next moment she was shocked

at her own thought, and felt the hot blood suffusing her neck and face. Reaction carried her thoughts back to the morning, which now seemed so long ago, and the wish that she were a cow, without human feelings. Shaking off both impressions, she said, "And the rope tew secure yourself tew? It's understanding, isn't it, Abe?"

"Yes, full understanding. It seems that laws, conventions and the fear of consequences aren't enough. But, if the understanding could also include a realization of what shame and unhappiness another person might have tew suffer all his life, I think that the whirlwind would lose its paower. The sins of the father are visited upon the children, as unjust as that seems."

Suddenly he uttered a short laugh, which seemed so

out of place that it startled her.

"The Lord only knows haow I come tew be talking like this tew you; I would have sworn that it wasn't possible for me tew discuss such a subject with any woman, especially a young one. Something's got intew me, to-day. I guess that the witches are riding me, as Aunt Lissy would say. Well, we've swapped so many intimate confidences, on first acquaintance, that I reckon we've just got tew be real pals. I've taken you quite a piece along the rough road of Grown-up Land, and it's up tew you tew lead me back for a vacation in that other country."

"Oh, I will, Abe. And we're going tew be pals; I just know that we are. We've sort of grown up to-

gether, in just one day, haven't we?"

"Sure have. And I'm daown-right glad that Sam Slade suggested my heading for the hospital hyar. He must be a good fairy in disguise."

Both of them laughed at the idea, as they mentally pictured the rough mountaineer, and thought how in-

sulted he would be over being classed as a fairy. For a second time their hands, his so big and hers so small, met by mutual impulse, and the moon shone in with cool and friendly light upon the compact.

"Yes," said Omie, after a moment's pause. "I'm glad you told me the story, Abe. But I wish you wouldn't feel as badly as you do about what folks think and say. Besides, perhaps the truth will be proved, some day."

He laughed, mirthlessly. "Not in this world, my child. When I got old enough I did everything humanly possible to find proof, and failed. That sort of thing happens only in fiction."

"But I've heard 'Smiles' say that sometimes truth is stranger than fiction, and perhaps it will be, this time. I'm going to believe it, anyway — for your sake, Abe."

At that moment Virgil's returning steps sounded on the veranda outside and his voice was heard demanding, "What's the big idea? Are you too lazy even tew light the lamp, Omie Gayheart? It's a darned lucky thing that all of the children are away on vacation, for you two are smashing rules, left and right."

"It's my fault," promptly responded Abe. "She wanted tew light up, some time ago, but I said I loved the darkness, though I hope that my deeds aren't evil."

"Well, it's after nine o'clock, and Camille told me tew tell you that she'd be in presently, tew 'put you tew bed,' as they say in hospitals. And she told me tew send you aout, a-kiting, Omie, and that, if you forgot tew bring the dishes, this time, you'd lose your job as assistant nurse."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated the patient. "Omie's promised — well, never mind. It's aour secret."

CHAPTER XII

NIGHT

OMIE crossed the creek on the new foot-bridge, to the cottage where her family lived, and stood in the doorway for a moment, viewing its architectural arrangements through new and critical eyes. Would it serve as a model for the home which she had promised to help Abe Blount design? Hardly. It would be much better to start fresh, for her home was the product of natural growth by additions whose sole purpose was usefulness. The effect was not bad—it seemed to be part of its environment, since the whole was still dominated by the original structure of hewn logs, but of course Abe's house would be built of board, of up-to-date construction throughout.

As it was Omie's home, and typified alike the old life in the Cumberland mountains and the life which they of Smiling Pass were slowly but surely superimposing upon it, the cabin is worth examining. When it had been erected, fifty years previous, to shelter the families of two generations of Tittles, it was regarded as quite the most imposing residence on "Beaten," yet it consisted merely of two medium-sized rooms, separated by a thin partition and a thick fieldstone chimney with broad-mouthed fireplaces of limestone on either side. Each half had its own door, but there were no windows to let in the sunshine, by day, or the breeze which swept down the pass, at night - not that they were greatly needed for this latter purpose, since many a wide chink between the logs furnished ventilation. And in each room lived, cooked, ate and slept — in rude

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bunks built along the walls — a father and mother Tittle and goodness knows how many offspring; the number increased yearly.

When "Smiles" acquired it as part of the Smiling Pass property the first thing which she had done, after stripping it within to its bare walls, was to add six shining windows. A porch followed, and an interior finish of paneled plasterboard. Neat iron beds, in one room for Virgil and in the other for his mother and young sister, supplanted the bunks. The fireplaces still supplied heat in the winter, but their wrought-iron cranes became merely quaint ornaments, for, of course, the

family ate in the House of Hunger, opposite.

When Virgil brought his bride to live there, still further improvements had been planned and were now just completed. The partition had been pierced for a new doorway, and the right-hand room, which Omie had just entered, had been transformed into an attractive living-room. Artistic prints, selected by the convent-trained Camille out of the hundreds of magazines which had been sent them by friends "aout in the U-nited States uv A-meriky," simply framed, brightened the walls; there were muslin curtains at the windows; bookshelves, well stocked with the favorite volumes of brother and sister; chairs and a table, made in their own carpenter shop; and even a small stand holding a Victrola — a discarded donation, whose squeaky, second-hand voice was still the wonder of those hills. Two more doorways had been cut through the end wall of substantial logs, giving into a new addition, comprising small, but neat and pleasant bedrooms where Omie and her mother slept. It stood as an example of what might be done with a mountain cabin, and told the story better than words.

Mrs. Gayheart was always quite ready to retire soon after the supper dishes were washed, and she was already in bed, her gaunt form vaguely outlined beneath the comforter, her prematurely aged face, now lined and looking perpetually weary, in spite of still retaining a suggestion of vanished loveliness like that which she had passed on to her daughter, turned towards the door. Omie went in to bid her good night. A deep affection existed between them, though it seldom found expression in words or demonstrative caresses, since they were both mountain women; so it is hardly strange that, when the girl suddenly bent over, drew her mother into her young arms and kissed her, almost passionately, Mrs. Gayheart should have exclaimed, "Why, Omie! You hain't sickening for a spell of fever, or something, air you? Your cheeks air all flushed-like, and your lips as hot and dry as — as anything."

Omie laughed the suggestion aside, insisting that she

was perfectly well, only a little tired.

"Well, naow, I reckon you air, what with the short night we all had, and you entertaining all sorts of famous folks, tew-day. You better be gitting along tew bed right smart, honey, unless you'd love tew sleep in hyar with your maw, like you used tew."

She made the proposition a bit wistfully, for the kiss had stirred the maternal instinct which slumbered within her sunken breast. But the girl's thoughts and emotions were too much engaged with other things to allow her to mark and perhaps respond to the veiled appeal in her mother's voice. She smiled faintly and shook her head. No, the bed was not big enough for two; and, with a final good night, she turned back to the living-room. A student's lamp was burning there, and the white brilliance from its mantle, fed by vapor-

ized gasoline, was cast full upon a little Bible which "Smiles" had given her, and which she always kept on

the table, though seldom opening it.

As she stood beside it, her thoughts still busy with what had just occurred, she laid her hand upon the book, wholly unconscious of what she was doing, and began to turn the leaves back and forth. Finally her lowered eyes rested on one particular verse, and she read it, mechanically. Something in the words focused her mind upon them, and she read the verse a second time. "... a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." It was a part of Isaiah's prophesy regarding the Messiah who was to come, she knew; but she also suddenly recalled that the words had somewhere been applied to their own Lincoln. Lincoln... Abe Blount! Surely the text was in full measure applicable to the man whose bedside she had just quitted; the tragic story of whose birth she had just learned from his own lips!

Strange that it should have been granted her to catch a glimpse of his soul, and to see the shadow which, through unhappy chance, had been cast upon it, there to remain through all his life, ineradicably darkening it. Others knew the story, of course; but how many guessed that the shadow was so dark? "A man of sorrows." Yes, truly that, yet she knew that he was one whose courage would not bow beneath his load; one who would always hide the fact from the eyes of others, always wear the visible badge of her Legion of the Cheerful, a smile.

Omie felt no uncertainty on that point. She had actually known the man but twelve brief hours, but she was sure that she did know him. He was as many sided as a crystal prism, but as clear, she thought. Any one who wished to look into his soul might do so;

if they failed to see it as she had seen it, their vision would be at fault and not the object obscured.

"What's got intew me, to-night?" whispered the girl, half aloud. "I'm thinking thoughts as queer as Aunt Lissy's must be. The next thing I know I'll be having prophetic dreams and start fortune-telling. Of course Abe Blount is different from any one I ever knew; but, after all, he's just a man — big, plain, awkward, he even acts like a claown, sometimes, and, although he can talk wonderfully, he's just as likely tew use ungrammatical maountain language, or that of army camps and coal mines, yet —"

That was just it: there was a "yet." She had sensed in him, without being able to define it, another quality which set him apart from ordinary men, and stirred an unsuspected something within her own nature. Many others had, in varying degrees, recognized the existence of this differentiating quality in him. One, at least, Preacher Billy, had already been so bold as to declare that their Abe possessed the true essence of greatness—although he did not use that expression—and been laughed at for it. Was the mountain preacher or the scoffers right? It is impossible to say, for only the Future can accurately read the measure of a man; the Present stands too close to the object, and its vision is distorted in consequence. And this is but a partial and unfinished biography.

Certainly Omie did not consciously ascribe greatness to her new friend, although now and again she had felt something akin to awe while she was in his presence, and, being vexed with herself because of it, called it "silliness." Now, however, her thoughts of him held only sympathy, friendliness, a loyalty which was growing into almost a passion, and a deep happiness over the fact that he had chosen her as a confidante and com-

rade. Yet the happiness was tinged with pain. She had never had quite such a feeling before, and it both thrilled and troubled her spirit.

"Have I begun tew fall in love with him?" she asked herself, and her heart promptly, and honestly, answered "No." Nevertheless, she felt that the day had changed

her, in some inexplicable fashion.

The girl walked slowly into her bedroom, and stood before the small looking-glass, leaning forward with her hands resting on the commode which held her simple toilet articles, bowl and water pitcher. Even the blemishes in the inexpensive glass could not make the mirrored face other than sweet and fair; but, as she thoughtfully studied it, she saw no smile on the lips or in the eyes.

"You told Abe the truth — you have grown up. And it isn't much fun."

A mistiness rose between the girl's eyes and the mirrored countenance; she turned hastily away and began to undress. It was customary for her to do this with her chamber door left open so that she might have the benefit of the light from the lamp on the living-room table, and, if Virgil came in there, it did not matter. False modesty is a by-product of a false civilization, and a thing unknown among the children of those mountains. But to-night there was an entirely new consciousness of change in her heart, a desire to be utterly alone so that she might think — think. The artificial light from the lamp was too intense; the cool radiance of the moon better fitted her mood. For the first time in her life she deliberately closed her bedroom door. The act was symbolic. She had, that day, definitely crossed the threshold of Womanhood, and now she shut the door behind her. Omie had grown up.

Lying upon her narrow bed, Omie could look out of the end window and up the creek to the spot where it disappeared behind the knoll which she had mentally selected as the location for Abe Blount's cottage, at the farther end of Smiling Pass. By turning her head to the left, upon her pillow, and looking through the side window, a small, square one hinged at the top and now hooked up to the ceiling, she could view the mountain, at the foot of which her home was built, from half-way up its steep slope to its peaked summit, and above that a narrow strip of sky. On such a summer night as this, the girl liked to lie awake and watch the moon sail upward while the rectangular shaft of light which it shot down upon her bed crept slowly across the sheet covering her young body, changing to a rhomboid, a streak, a mere line, and then vanishing altogether. That was a signal for her to turn over on her right side, snuggle her head, with its mass of unbound, wavy hair, down upon her outstretched bare arm, close her eyes, and fall asleep.

To-night she went through all of the usual preliminaries, but slumber refused to follow. Her mind was weary, but still wide awake, and the seat of crowding thoughts and memories. The events of the day, all the stories which she had heard concerning their guest, her own sensations, passed through her brain one after another, like a flock of sheep, and then returned singly or in groups, and she could not drive them away.

She heard her sister-in-law come in, move quietly about the living-room for a moment, call a low-voiced "Good night," and, receiving no answer, pass into her own room. Virgil, however, was still out, and Omie began to think and worry about him, as well. He had remarked that he was going for a little while down to Jud Amos's store, and now there rushed back to her

mind the message which Sam Slade had given, regarding the threats which the drunken youths had made that morning. Had her brother really gone to the store, and, if so, had it been merely to chat for a few moments with some of their mountain neighbors who nightly gathered there to chew tobacco, spin yarns, or listen to one of their number draw from a home-made fiddle such tunes as "Black-eyed Susan," "Git Along Daown Town," "Hook and Line," and "Cluck Old Hen"? Or had he gone, rather, for the purpose of forming a guard to protect Smiling Pass and its help-less guest against possible attack?

The wind had begun to rise again; every now and then it spoke with a mournful tone from the forest above. Clouds must have gathered over the face of the moon, for the creek below no longer shimmered like a ribbon of silver. A few drops of rain were driven in at the open window, striking upon her heated face. The girl jumped up and stood for a moment, with her plain nightgown blown close against her form, straining her eyes into the darkness which filled the valley, but seeing nothing. Then she reached up, unhooked the window over her bed, and closed it.

"Air that you, Omie?" demanded her mother's sleepy voice from the other side of the thin partition. "What air you dewin'? You hain't sick, air you?"

"No, no. I was just shutting the window; it's starting tew rain. Go tew sleep, maw."

Omie returned to her bed, but now sleep seemed further away than ever. Her thoughts were again all of Abe Blount, but with a new twist; of the dangers which had surrounded him during so much of his career, the threats which had repeatedly been made against his life, since he had become Sheriff, and which had been far from the menacings of idle men, as had

been proven by more than one shot fired from ambush previous to the one by which he had actually been wounded, twenty-four hours before. And, mixed with the prospect of larger service and greater honors in the future, was the probability of increased dangers. If he were elected to the office of State's Attorney, and should put his announced intentions into execution, he would most certainly add to his present feud with the moonshiners, still another with the powerful, sinister group of men who were instrumental in encouraging the simple folk of those hills to make and traffic in illicit whiskey. Yes, and yet another with the evil element among the laborers in the ever-encroaching coal mines, who threatened not only more strikes with attendant disorder, but the lifting of the blood red flag of anarchy within those hills.

And now the man who faced all these perils — who stood forth like a David, accepting the challenge of the Goliath that had invaded their mountain home — was no longer the mythical Sheriff Blount, a mere romantic name to her, no longer the unreal but shining hero of her imagination. He was her friend and "pal," who on the morrow was going to read "Alice in Wonderland" to her, whose home in the hills she was soon going to plan — a very real person, indeed.

Again the army of distressed thoughts re-formed its ranks, and marched and countermarched through her tired brain, which had begun to ache with a dull, measured throbbing, as though her thoughts were in fact a rythmically tramping host. They remained deaf to her mental command to halt; but at length, as utter weariness overcame her, resolved themselves into two absurd phrases which she kept repeating over and over, her lips forming the words, "Moonshiners; coal miners. Moonshiners; coal miners." Once drowsiness, born of

exhaustion, slid a distorting glass before her mind, and she caught herself changing it to, "Coal shiners; moon miners," and brought herself back with a vexed little laugh at the absurdity of the whole performance, enacted against her will.

"If I've got tew repeat a silly rhyme it might as well be a pleasanter one, at least," she said to herself. And, although she had never heard of M. Coué, or the theory of autosuggestion, she added, "I'll say 'The Legion of the Cheerful' over ten times, and see if that won't put me to sleep. 'Dark claouds gittin' blacker, honey, Ol' Man Trouble pressin' sore? . . .'" and so on to "'J'ine the Legion, you will find hit helps tew shorten many a mile. As fer trouble, you won't mind hit half so much, if you jest SMILE."

And before she had gone wholly through the verse a second time Omie had fallen into deep, though restless, slumber.

As was inevitable, the girl immediately began to dream. At the outset her subconscious fantasies were both fragmentary and distorted; but soon the kaleidoscopic bits began to fall into place and form a changing picture so sharp and clear that, on awaking, she remembered every detail of it.

A new cottage-house stood under the shadow of a giant sycamore tree, on the knoll where the creek bent westward. In a general way it was modeled after the House of Happiness, but occasionally it changed shape grotesquely. Some one was standing in the doorway—a woman whose appearance also altered repeatedly. Now it seemed to be herself; now Marion Clayton; and now some one unknown to her. A man appeared in the picture, driving an automobile up the creek road, and Omie thought, "Why, it is the very first one ever to get up intew these maountains!" Now it faded,

dissolved into an immense mule, from which the man dismounted, the animal instantly vanishing, and began to climb the hillside. She could recognize him, now. It was Abe, bearing himself with unusual dignity, and dressed in dark clothing which seemed to speak of high position. His face grew clearer; it was no longer homely, but transfigured with an inner light, and his eyes were smiling, although his mouth drooped with a look of great weariness.

Now the woman in the doorway was certainly herself, and, although she was viewing the scene as a spectator, she clearly experienced the feelings of that other self — joy and an almost painful longing to stretch out her arms to the man, draw him to her bosom and protect him — from something. Was she Abe Blount's wife? No, she could not be that, for she felt none of the whirlwind of love in her heart, only the love of a protector and comforter — a mother's love. Why, that was it! That other woman whom she had not known and who now seemed to be strangely confused with herself was Abe's mother!

The light faded from the picture as a deep shadow passed over the scene. The man was not far away, but, although he was walking rapidly, he seemed to draw no nearer to her, and now her arms were stretched out to him. She wanted to gaze and gaze on his countenance, for it was wonderfully appealing, but something drew her eyes, irresistibly, to one side — and her heart stopped beating, for she saw a dim form crouching behind the bushes. She had never seen the man before, but instinct told her that it was Abe's cousin, Noah Fugate. He held a rifle and now thrust it slowly forward. Abe waved his hand to her, his lips smiled and he became wholly himself. She tried, desperately, to scream out a warning, but could utter no

sound. Now a shot rang out — and the girl started awake, crying aloud in terror.

"What on earth's the matter, Omie?" Virgil called

the question.

"Oh! Oh!" Her breath came in gasping sobs. "Then it wasn't true?"

Her brother opened the bedroom door, and stood smiling on the threshold. "What wasn't true, sis?" he asked.

She gave an unsteady laugh, rather hysterical. "I reckon I must have been having an awful dream. He—some one got shot. Where have you been at this haour of the night, Virgil Gayheart?"

"Oh, just strolling araound a bit. Don't get worried — everything's as quiet as a grave, and Abe's saound asleep. 'Got shot,' you said? Well, the door blew tew with a bang, when I came in, but there hasn't been any shooting. Abe's enemies wisely decided not tew come to-night."

PART THE SECOND

ONE YEAR

IN WHICH THE CROWDING EVENTS OF TWELVE MONTHS

ARE BRIEFLY EPITOMIZED



CHAPTER I

INTERLUDE

If the complete biography of Abraham Blount is ever written — perhaps it would be better to say when it is written — several long chapters will necessarily be devoted to a chronicle of the crowded legal and political events which occurred in those Cumberland mountain regions during the twelve months which elapsed between the end of June, Nineteen Twenty-one, and the corresponding time a year later. For man and events were inseparably linked.

But the novelist, even when his narrative is founded upon historical happenings, whether recent or remote, should pick and choose only those incidents which have a direct bearing upon the story. He may merely mention in passing, or must reject altogether, a multitude of actual events which may, in themselves, have been more interesting than were those which he records. Oftentimes minor incidents, like those of the June day which furnished the subject matter of the first part of this history, have a more profound and lasting effect on the life and character of the dramatis personæ than certain great ones which actually influence the course of human history.

Abe's meeting with Congressman Clayton, his daughter, and Omie Gayheart, affected his career, both personal and political, more than did his successful coping with a situation which threatened to shake the State to its foundations, and might even have become as nationally important as the Herrin Massacre.

So, although this part of the story deals with these

great events, it will be rather a sketchy pen picture than a complete setting forth of the events, although a few of the incidents may be drawn in some detail, just as a painter of historical subjects frequently "roughs out" upon his canvas some great, dramatic scene, but here and there with some care works up, for future reference, a fragment which he desires to preserve with particular verisimilitude.

For our purpose we shall make occasional use of the diary which Omie Gayheart began to keep, intermittently, the day after Abe Blount's arrival at Smiling Pass, and also quote part of a long letter which she sent to Rose McDonald, soon after their guest had departed, his wound cured. She wrote it on the second-hand office typewriter, by the Hunt & Find system, using the index finger of her left hand and the middle finger of her right hand.

"For once in my life [she wrote] I have been almost selfishly glad that you were not here, Smiles dear. For, if you had been, I know that Abe would not have wasted any time on commonplace me. As it was, I was with him almost all the time until school reopened. And it was such fun hearing him read aloud and tell stories — goodness knows how he ever remembers so many! — and helping draw the plans for his new house, which he is actually going to build here. Preacher Billy is simply delighted that Abe is coming 'home,' and is going to do most of the work on it; but Virgil and the boys will help. Of course our sawmill will provide the lumber.

"When school began again and the pupils came back, I naturally had to stop being with him so much, partly because of my work, and partly because of your Rules and Regulations. He stayed two weeks in all, and I am sure that his being here was wonderful for the children; all the girls liked him, although I think that most of them stood a little in awe of him, and the boys went simply crazy over

him. They much preferred to hang about him than to play baseball or basket ball, and you should have seen the 'pep' that he put into their Boy Scout drills.

"Speaking (or writing) of boys naturally reminds me of dogs, and I must tell you about something which happened the second day that Abe was here. I was out on the veranda when up the creek road, under the gate, and straight up the path and steps, came the homeliest, thinnest, long-leggedest, clumsy footedest and mournfulest looking 'haound dawg' you ever did see! I called to him, but he didn't pay the slightest attention to me. Instead he ran right into the hospital. I followed, and found him with his front paws up on the side of Abe's bed, wagging at one end, but actually crying with joy at the other. He belongs to Abe, of course, and had actually come all the way up from Fayville, hunting for his master, and found him. I can't understand how, can you? Abe said that they adopted each other about a year ago, which seemed fitting, since they were both mountain waifs, and he named him Abraham, after himself, but calls him 'Ham' for short — 'so that folks will have some way of telling us apart,' he explained. The dog is really a lot like him, homely, but amusing and very wise. I love him — the dog, I mean.

"But I started to tell what Abe did for the children. As soon as his foot got well enough so that he could hobble about on a huge crutch, which Virgil made for him, he came down to the school-house for an hour every afternoon, and gave us a series of simply wonderful talks on patriotism and law, as part of our Citizenship Training Course. The fathers and mothers got to coming, also, and it would have done your heart good to have seen how eagerly they listened to him, and heard the questions that they asked, showing their interest.

"I don't see how he could have learned such a lot about conditions all over the United States — it seems to me that he knows something about almost everything. A lawyer has to, he said. Of course he talked mostly on the necessity of obedience to the laws and authorities, and how all Americans seem to be losing their respect for both, now-a-days. Did you know that the 'crime wave' about which so much has been written in the papers, did not start with the World War, but has been steadily growing during the last fifteen years, or more? I didn't, but Abe says so."

What Abe said on the subject, using the simplest language and explaining every point carefully, was in brief this: With the start of the Twentieth Century there was launched a new, and widespread, movement towards greater freedom of thought — political, sociological and religious. This was in itself far from being a bad thing, although it inevitably follows that, when a large number of people deliberately cut themselves loose from the things which have stood through the ages, unchanged or changing very slowly, they drift aimlessly about with the shifting tides for a long time before they reach another port where they can tie up. And the new one is not always better than that from which they put to sea.

Preacher Billy had been present, and had broken in with a quotation from the Apostle Paul, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Abe had agreed that the injunction was wise, but that he preferred a more progressive, forward-looking command, saying that human and social progress is dependent upon frequent voyages of discovery into the unknown, even though they might temporarily bring unrest and other attendant evils in their wake. The race could never move onward towards its higher destiny if there were no men and women who dared, like Columbus, to put out into uncharted seas.

Revolt from mental and spiritual bondage, the breaking of chains forged by tyrannical ignorance during the darker ages, was of course commendable; but, unfortunately, such movements are usually accompanied by a general breaking down of all restraints, for the time being. The enlightened few strive to strike off some of the restricting shackles — antiquated beliefs and customs which have outlived their usefulness — and be truly free; the ignorant majority senses the spirit of unrest abroad in the world and turn against all law, claiming an equal right. But the freedom which they seek is false.

America had taken the lead in the movement, as in most movements towards freedom. She had opened the doors of Thought, first and widest. Much that was good had come out of them into a life whose horizon was larger, whose atmosphere was clearer and more invigorating. But, side by side with the good, had crowded much that was evil, and it was still abroad and abusing its freedom.

This, Abe contended, was what underlay and accounted for much of the almost appalling increase of crime, particularly since 1910, and why there was a larger percentage of criminals among those who had been born in foreign lands than there was in the countries of their birth, as well as among our native Americans — they could not stand the atmosphere of unrestrained freedom. The new disrespect for established customs and laws affected all, to some degree; but, with the masses, the disrespect was for the fundamental laws which spelt safety to mankind; and, unless they should be held firmly in check by the hand of the Law, itself, until education had mustered itself to aid in the work of readjustment, and conditions had stabilized themselves, as they always do, in time, "the last state would be worse than the first."

Omie's letter did not go into all this — she jumped ahead to the thing which appealed most strongly to her young imagination.

"And what do you think he has done to try to offset it in these mountains, at least? He helped us organize a new society, which we call the 'League to Promote Loyalty to Law.'* We decided upon the name ourselves, after a lot of discussion. Preacher Billy suggested the words 'Respect for Law,' but Abe said that, although respect was a fine word, it seemed to him sort of passive — like a man sitting in a back seat at a Preaching, with his hands folded. Then I suggested 'Loyalty,' which I thought sounded as though it were ready to fight for a cause, if necessary. I never realized, before, that words could be so much like people.

"Abe pretended to like it immensely, especially because it commenced with an 'L,' which he said was a good square up-standing letter. And he wrote out the name on the blackboard, beside your 'S' motto—

erve always ave the helpless trive and MILE.'

"Then he made another big letter,—'L' this time,— and we suggested the great words for which it stands: Life, Liberty, Law, Light and Love.

"Of course every member of the Citizenship Club joined right away, since all that we had to do was to pledge ourselves to obey the law, and try to teach others to do the same, and, before he left us, a number of the men and women had done the same. I got a lot of white feathers and painted them with bands of blue and red, and now all the boys are wearing them in their caps, and some of the men are wearing tiny ones in their hat bands, as badges showing that they have joined our League."

Noah Fugate's prophecy that Abe was not much longer to remain Sheriff of the county was fulfilled a

^{*}The writer cannot state whether or not this was the first league of the nature started in America, but at least its origin was independent of all others, and resulted from the same conditions which gave birth to them.

good deal sooner than any one expected, for Fate seems to have been bent upon advancing him, politically, at a startling pace — for a time. Before his wounded foot was really sufficiently healed so that he could leave Smiling Pass with safety, the State's Attorney died, and, largely on the recommendation of Congressman Clayton — solicited thereto by his daughter, who was still full of enthusiasm over her acquaintanceship with "that romantic Sheriff Blount"—the Governor summoned him to the State Capitol. The interview, during which each became powerfully impressed with the other's virile qualities, ended in Abe Blount's receiving an appointment as acting State's Attorney, to serve out the unexpired balance of that term.

Thus his feet were securely planted on the second rung of the political ladder four months earlier than any one had expected. And he was, moreover, enabled to enter immediately and with complete concentration upon his new, arduous duties, and that without the additional worries attendant upon waging a campaign for election. He was now in line to succeed himself in the office, unopposed, since his only opponent had been removed from the race by the hand of Death.

A second prophecy was also shortly fulfilled — the one uttered by Sam Slade in warning Noah Fugate to "speak pritty," on the night when they had cut up the still owned by Abe's uncle, since Abe might be called upon to prosecute the case against him. As it happened, it was the very first case in which the new State's Attorney appeared on behalf of the People; a fact which increased the interest in it tremendously.

The comment upon it in Omie's journal was brief, for that evening she was alike too excited and tired to write at any length. "To-day I went down to Court for the first time, and heard State's Attorney Abe

Blount try the case against the moonshiners who shot him. I was never so thrilled in all my life, and just a bit frightened, too. P. S. Abe won, of course."

In its general aspects there was nothing about the trial either to thrill or frighten any one who was familiar with cases of that nature tried in a county court in the mountains; but it is not strange that a girl like Omie should have been moved to tense excitement by the scene. Moreover, it enabled her to visualize more vividly the incident which Virgil had described as having taken place in that very room, years before, when Abe Blount won his title of "The Little Lawyer." Boy and man, she saw him now—the outstanding figure in two gripping dramas. Virgil had allowed her to ride down with him, against his better judgment, having yielded to her insistent pleas, and he regretted his compliance before they had reached the threshold of the court room.

Abe was startled at the sight of her, and, after the flash of pleased surprise which had shown when he first caught sight of his new friends had quickly faded from his face, the shadow of uneasiness fell upon it. Nevertheless, he promptly shouldered his towering way through the crowd, which packed the room from wall to wall and from the entrance to the counsel's table before the Judge's bench, shook hands with them warmly and escorted them to seats up front.

It was Omie's first opportunity to look about her; she shivered a little and drew closer to her brother's side. Prisoners, jury, witnesses and spectators, they were all, in the main, a rudely dressed lot which looked much more desperate packed together there than when met individually on the hills. Most of those present were gaunt and sinewy mountaineers with sullen faces, outwardly apathetic in appearance but inwardly filled

with a smoldering resentment against the prosecutor—embers which might readily be kindled into a revengeful blaze, and the girl sensed the fact. Many of the men were undoubtedly themselves moonshiners; a goodly number were more or less closely related to the defendants; the breath of not a few was unpleasantly redolent with the smell of "corn licker." These latter made no attempt to keep inaudible their muttered threats as to what was going to happen if—

There was nothing very unusual in all this; but, when Omie overheard snatches of such menacing remarks directed against the man who, as they put it, had "gone agin his own flesh and blood," and was now "persecutin'" him, icy fingers seemed to grip her heart. And they tightened, convulsively, when her curious gaze first fell upon Noah Fugate, whose black eyes, burning with unconcealed hate under frowning brows, were fixed on Abe's face. The dream was still vivid in her memory!

For his part, the new State's Attorney appeared cool and unconcerned. He conducted the case with a quiet, yet forceful, manner, and secured the expected conviction, since there was no defense offered, without having allowed so much as a mention of the fact that he had been shot by one of the defendants to come out in the evidence given by his Deputies. The Court knew the whole story, of course, but would not take judicial cognizance of it, testimony thereto being lacking.

The verdict of "Guilty" produced an uneasy movement in the crowd, and a renewal of the hostile mutterings; but these speedily changed to expressions of astonishment when Abe forthwith proceeded to address to the presiding Justice an earnest plea that a fine be imposed instead of a penitentiary sentence, in view of the fact that two of the defendants were scarcely more

than boys, and the other was the principal support of an exceedingly large family. It was a simple statement of the case with nothing particularly eloquent or dramatic about it, until he came to the part where he suggested the amount of the fine. This caused his auditors to gasp, for they knew that no such fine had ever been imposed in that Court. Sensation mounted on sensation when the Judge promptly accepted the suggestion, and Desty Fugate slouched forward to the clerk's table, extracted a large roll of bills from a pocket of his overalls, paid the fine in full — and then turned and publicly grasped the hand of his nephew and prosecutor.

Virgil knew something of mob psychology. He gave a "hurray" and the fickle crowd set up a shout which drowned out the thunderings of the Judge's gavel, and many of those who had come there vowing to "git" the State's Attorney, if he got a conviction, stayed to cheer him, and to press about Desty Fugate with rough jokes upon the financial success of his illicit business and offers to go into partnership with him when he should start up another little still. And they laughed louder than ever, winking broadly, when he insisted that he was done with making "corn licker," for good and all.

A possible tragedy had been given a happy ending, and none, except the principals in the drama, knew that it had all been planned out in advance, and that, on the previous night, Abe had ridden through the darkness up the winding creek to his uncle's cabin, wormed from him a statement of the amount — a pitifully small one — which he could pay by way of a fine, and supplied the balance of the sum which he and the Judge had privately agreed upon out of his own limited bank account, a loan which he well knew was in effect a gift.

The demands of Justice must be satisfied; but the ties of kinship were strong.

Desty and his eldest boy were grateful to the point of tears, and gave Abe their solemn pledge to stop moonshining and keep within the law thereafter. But not so Noah. He had maintained a sullen silence during the conference, and, at its close, had flung himself out into the night, boiling with hot anger at his father's soft surrender. He would not be a party to it, although he must, perforce, share in its benefits. Now, the trial ended, he started to follow his father and brother out of the court room, but paused, as he had done on the mountain, to scowl bitterly at his cousin. If looks could kill, Abe Blount would not have left the place alive.

Omie had stood up. The youth was now almost in front of her, and she started and shrank away from him. Her movement must have caught his attention, for he turned and looked directly at her. Then an odd thing occurred. Noah's expression underwent a swift and complete change. The hate in his eyes vanished, and gave place to startled admiration; a deep flush spread over his tanned face. Omie shrank back still further, paling a little. Then two spots of red appeared in her own cheeks, under his fixed gaze. Suddenly the boy turned on his heel and almost savagely forced his way out through the thinning crowd.

"The strangest thing has happened," wrote Omie. "Noah Fugate was up here this morning, asking to be taken in as a student at our school. When I went to tell Virgil he was wild and wanted to kick him down the stairs; but I persuaded him to talk with the boy, thinking that we might be able to influence him along the right lines and change his hostility towards Abe

Blount. By an odd coincidence, Abe himself rode up while the two were talking and, in spite of the fact that Noah would not even return his friendly greeting, he urged Virgil to give him a chance, telling him that, if Smiling Pass were to live up to its possibilities, it must be ready to lend its influence towards changing the viewpoint of just such mountain youths, and saying that he felt sure that Noah was in earnest about wanting to get an education, and that he would make good. So Virgil finally agreed to give Noah a chance. I was glad and a little afraid as well. I know that I am going to dislike him and he frightens me, too; but, if we can help to remove *one* possible stumblingblock from Abe's path, I shall be very happy."

Thereafter, Omie's diary contains various brief references to Noah Fugate, who apparently did "make good" from the start, showing much of the aptitude for books which had distinguished his cousin in school and college. Also a number of short ones relating to Abe himself, which, however, grow more and more infrequent as the months pass. During the summer he occasionally went to spend an hour or a night at Smiling Pass, and the camaraderie which had sprung up between them at the start of their acquaintance was always renewed, but the only mention of the proposed cottage is found in the words, "I am too disappointed for anything. Abe says that he cannot afford to build a house this year, after all. I cannot understand it, for I thought that he was making loads of money, as State's Attorney."

Noah would have been able to tell her the reason for his cousin's lack of funds, but naturally he kept silent.

Late that fall appears the last reference to him until the following spring. "Every one," it reads, "says that moonshining has already greatly decreased in this county, thanks to Abe Blount's wonderful success as public prosecutor, and there has not been a single shooting case this summer. We're all awfully proud of him, and, knowing how very busy he must be, we can forgive him for not coming up here to see his old friends. But it seems as though he might at least write us, once in a while, and he hasn't, once."

Abe did, indeed, have a reasonable excuse for not paying any visits, for he knew that the price of safety in that region was the eternal vigilance of its State's Attorney, backed up by the unflagging influence which his example had on the new Sheriff and his Deputies. Seven days a week his bare office in Fayville was the busiest spot in the county, and many men visited it, not a few of them sullen or belligerent upon entering, and either smiling or wearing a thoroughly cowed expression upon departing therefrom. And seven nights each week the light shone late from its uncurtained windows.

As for letter writing, he never did it, unless an answer was absolutely required to some communication. Lawyer and mountaineer, alike, he disliked the practice. "Least said, in writing, soonest mended," he would sometimes drawl with a smile, when taken to task for this failing; — but his failure as a correspondent hurt.

CHAPTER II

BOMBSHELLS

In so far as any one save himself knew, the State's Attorney was, during the disagreeable winter which followed, merely very busily engaged with the routine duties of his new office. He kept his own counsel, especially regarding the thing which he considered as most important of all—the preparation of a legal bombshell which he hoped would blow to smithereens one lawless element in the community.

Simultaneously other forces were combining to cause a far more terrific explosion, which was to shake to its foundations an industry employing three-quarters of a million men, and the disastrous effects of which were to be felt by the whole country.

Both bombs were timed to explode early in the spring. The one so painstakingly prepared by Abe Blount, proved to be a "dud"— in army parlance—yet it caused a marked sensation within certain limited and hidden circles, and, in the end, had quite as much effect upon his future political career as did the other, which made him more than ever the hero. Not, however, in the same manner.

Both are mentioned in Omie's diary. Regarding the first, she wrote, "Virgil has been down to Fayville today, and says that the folks there are all excited, for Abe has summoned the Grand Jury in a special session which is surrounded with mystery. Nobody seems to know just what it is for, but V. thinks that he may be going to attempt to indict the men higher up in the moonshine business — the organized band which is be-

hind our mountain stills, and which disposes of the 'corn' at a huge profit, down in the cities. Preacher Billy was here when V. got home, and he was wildly enthusiastic. I think that he must be a little proud of having coined the phrase which the newspapers all took up when Abe was a candidate, for he cried, 'Hit's jest as I said. For this we placed the sharp sword uv the law in aour David's hand. Naow he will cut off the head of Goliath.' But V. was not so sure that anything wonderful is going to come of it, and he reminded Billy that Abe had got to find the head, before he can cut it off, and that it has been pretty well hidden, up to now. It made me think of the Cheshire cat, in Alice in Wonderland, which Abe read me when he was here. Only it was 'contrariwise, nohow.'"

To the State's Attorney's keenest disappointment and chagrin, Virgil's pessimistic surmise proved to be correct. It hurt his prestige a little and his pride a lot. Secret as he had apparently kept the preliminaries, hints of what was in preparation must have been carried to the headquarters of the enemy, and that mysterious and powerful organization had just as secretly been able to tamper with the bomb and remove most of its charge.

Of course the hearings before the Grand Jury were not public, but Abe later confided to Preacher Billy that everything had gone wrong from the start. Important witnesses whom he had summoned at the last moment — men whom he knew to be bootlegging "gobetweens" and whom he had had under surveillance for weeks — disappeared, and the place thereof knew them no more. He also said that he had every reason to believe that the majority of the jurors had been successfully approached. He could not prove it; but at least some of them who were notorious ne'er-do-weels evi-

denced a remarkable degree of prosperity soon after the event. At any event, the jury was from the start a hostile one, and their findings almost wholly negative. Two men were indicted, indeed; but they were merely ordinary and ignorant bootleggers, who, throughout the hearing and their subsequent trial, stubbornly denied that they worked for any one else. They were fined, somewhat heavily, and paid without a whimper.

"All that I succeeded in dewing, this time," said Abe, dryly, "was tew stir up a hornets' nest and get well stung for my pains. The worst of it is that I don't know any more abaout them than I did before, but they dew know that I'm after 'em. Oh, well, it's all part of the game, and there's no sense in crying over spilt milk; but you might tell Omie, when you see her, that her verse about 'The Legion of the Cheerful' came in handy, last night."

So much for the first explosion.

The second occurred on the first day of April; but it was no joke. On that date commenced the greatest coal strike in history. Like fire before a gale it spread, West and South, while the Nation, looking forward to summer and warm weather for a time, shrugged its collective shoulders and said, in effect, "Let miner and operator fight it out; if we can believe one-half of what each side says regarding the other, both are utterly unreasonable. At least, it is no affair of ours. There is nothing that we can do about it, although we're sure to lose, whichever side wins. The consumer always pays, in the end. Indeed, every one says that the operators aren't really sorry to have a strike at this time; they are overloaded with coal at the mine heads now, and it will give them a perfect excuse to boost prices. Next winter? Oh, of course there will be coal enough by then! Winter is seven months away, and it will

all be settled long before that. Besides, if the trouble gets too bad the Government will step in, and make them come to terms. Let's go to the ball game."

"The Government." When are we Americans going to realize that the Government is not a detached, self-functioning and all-powerful entity, but ourselves, acting as, and when, we, the sovereign people, decree that it shall, and seldom else?

But if, during the early weeks of the strike, the Public regarded it with annoyed apathy — as something to read about in the newspapers and to discuss academically — the operators and miners' union knew that they were engaged in a bitter fight, which would probably go to a finish. The latter, without doubt, not only believed that its attitude was right and demands just; but felt it could force complete compliance with them and win decisively, if only it could succeed in restricting the output from all the mines to a definite number of tons, weekly. The figure was placed at four million. If a less amount than that were mined, the time would shortly come when not only The People, but Big Business, would feel the pinch and raise such an outcry that either the Operators would be forced to yield, or the Federal Government would be driven to step in and assume control of the mines, which would be a virtual victory for the miners. Skilled workers would be needed, and the strike leaders believed that, with the Government in charge, their demands would be promptly met.

In order to achieve the desired result, not only must all of the unionized mines be closed down tight, but also a very material number of those which were still being run on the non-union principle. This, in a nutthell, was their problem. How stubbornly they set themselves to its solution, leaving no stone unturned, no expedient untried, is a matter of recent history. It is enough for our present purpose to state that, within a few weeks, the great industry was all but wholly paralyzed. Six hundred thousand miners had abandoned pick and shovel, and this number included thousands who were not affiliated with the United Mine Workers of America; but who had been persuaded, by one method or another, that the fight was being waged for their equal benefit.

Victory trembled in the balance! Every additional mine closed, every additional miner induced, or coerced, to join the ranks of the strikers, brought it closer within their reach. Yet many mines in which the United Mine Workers had not succeeded in getting foothold still remained in operation and were working overtime. These *must* be stopped, somehow!

The county for which Abe Blount was chief law officer produced a very material part of the forty-odd million tons of coal which were mined, annually, within the borders of the State of Cumberland; it contained a like proportion of the fifty thousand skilled miners who dug the precious carbon from its wooded mountain-sides. And there existed a peculiar situation one fraught with grave consequences. Within that region the Operators had, from the beginning, bitterly fought the Union, but the latter had nevertheless been successful in making marked inroads into the territory, especially during the four former strikes of 1898, 1912, 1917 and 1919. The result was that, in not a few localities, tunnels and shafts dug, and now deserted, by unionized miners were thrust into one side of a precipitous mountain-side, while on the farther flank of the same mountain, within easy rifle-shot from its dividing crest, non-union men were toiling, day and night, and the winding single spur track owned by the com-

pany was continually rattling with carloads of highgrade coal for the country beyond the hills. The opposing forces were practically entrenched face to face; it was a natural battlefield, the more so because of its remoteness from anything like real civilization and the restraint of law. It was, in fact, a key position. No real towns were there, no military, only the Sheriff and his Deputies, regular and special — the hated mine guards employed by the operators to protect their property, and keep meddlers away from their workmen. War might there be waged almost without interference, it seemed. The strikers knew it; the Operators knew it — so did the State's Attorney, and, immediately after his Grand Jury fiasco was over, he moved his headquarters into the very heart of the region where the battle seemed about to be joined in earnest, and prepared to maintain law and order, if that were possible.

Wrote Omie, "We are all greatly worried about Abe, who has gone into the coal fields to try to prevent disorder during the strike. There are thousands of desperate strikers nearby; there has been trouble in the mines already, and V. says that things are warming up, and that, if Abe starts to interfere, he will be in actual danger of his life. Oh, I do hope that noth-

ing happens!"

Things were "warming up." The United Mine Workers had, from the outset, endeavored to induce the non-union laborers, especially in the great Iron Mountain Mines, to join their ranks, but so far these had remained loyal to their employers, perhaps because they were able to work overtime and be paid accordingly. The Operators had countered by obtaining injunctions; these had been answered by bullets, although the shooting had been desultory, by the night burning of a tipple

and the destruction of a small hoist house. Work continued; but the mine owners were on the defensive, and their workers growing more and more restive—held in check by the mine guards who allowed no meetings and no strangers within the gates. The menace was growing with every day that passed, and the Operators were only too glad to have a man of the stamp and reputation of Abe Blount appear to take charge of a situation which was fast becoming too much for them. To be sure he was only one man; but he was fearless and represented the majesty and force of the law, at least. There was some comfort for them in that thought.

Almost simultaneously with Abe's arrival on one side of the dividing hills, there appeared in the other camp the notorious Tom Lemos, who was almost universally known as "Dago." It was not his first visit to those hills on business, as Abe had reminded Congressman Clayton. Dago Lemos was now a picturesque and powerful character, the product of environment and circumstance combined with hot Italian blood, for his father had immigrated from Sicily and become a miner in Mingo County, West Virginia, when Little Tomasso was a baby. The family had moved westward with the march of the industry, and the boy had grown up half miner, half mountaineer, equally welcome in coal field and cabin, for in his 'teens he had been gay and laughter-loving, handsome in a dark, striking way, and the possessor of a glorious, although untutored, tenor voice.

But, soon after Dago Lemos became of age, something occurred which changed the course of his life completely. He worked in the mines, off and on, and one afternoon a defective cable gave way, a loaded car descended upon him, and he received a compound fracture of the leg and other injuries. The company re-

fused him compensation on the ground of contributory negligence, he had no money with which to fight the case in court, and, in any event, felt certain that he would gain nothing by so doing; and thus his employers callously sowed a seed of bitterness that was to grow into a thorn which would eventually pierce the whole industry. From a carefree lad, Lemos turned into a morose man, almost overnight. He had an exceptionally keen native intellect, and to his smattering of education he now began to add the self-study of history, economics, politics and socialism. His brain developed quickly; but the development was one-sided and became more and more warped. Still, his knowledge set him apart from his fellows and made him a man of mark. He became an impassioned orator. Echoes of his fiery speeches of denunciation reached beyond the hills. They came to the ears of the President of the United Mine Workers of America, and Lemos was added to the force of organizers. In the previous strike he had served with notable effectiveness in that capacity, as was well known. Few knew, however, that he had also acted as financial agent in supplying arms and ammunition to the strikers, and, in this capacity, the finesse in intrigue natural to an Italian, combined with the careless courage of a mountaineer, served him well. Both had been spurred on by his unrelenting hatred of all Mine Operators.

By virtue of his position in the union, and his native force and ability, he straightway took command of the strikers' forces, now. They had theretofore lacked real leadership; but, with his coming, both sides felt that horns were soon to be locked in deadly conflict.

Yet it was Abe who made the first open move. He promptly sent Lemos an invitation to meet him, and discuss the whole situation in a frank and friendly

manner. To this suggestion the other returned the curt answer that there was nothing to discuss. That very evening witnessed one of the most dramatic events of the whole long conflict — one which has never been described in print.

Night was just falling. The western heavens still retained the pink and gold afterglow of the sunset; but the narrow valley on the eastern side of the dividing mountain was filled with deep shadow which had almost wholly blotted out the double line of cottages that stood, drably monotonous, between the single track, skirting the mountain's base, and the swollen creek. Slatternly women, with faces devoid of ambition or hope, sat lumpily on blackened doorsteps; pale and undernourished children, grimy with coal dust, played listlessly among the wandering hogs. Men of many nations were gathered in idle groups, smoking in silence or talking in heavy, polyglot voices.

The evening was unseasonably hot, so that all doors were opened wide, and within one of the cottages five men might have been seen seated in low-voiced discussion, around a bare table, holding only a crude oil lamp.

The group was suddenly hidden from the sight of those without by a new form silhouetted in the doorway; the figure of a very tall and lanky man clad in rough riding clothes, high boots and an old slouch hat.

The five within the room glanced up, impatiently—and then started from their chairs. Astonishment, anger and consternation mingled in their expressions, and one of them, a thick-set miner with a coarse, unshaven face, hastily reached towards his right hip, where a revolver hung in a holster attached to his sagging belt; but he stopped in the act of drawing it when another ripped out a command, coupled with an oath.

The latter, who was slender, dark and morosely handsome, was the only one that had remained apparently unmoved by the intrusion.

"Good evenin', boys," said Abe, in his amiable, drawling voice, as he calmly advanced into the room and gave his hat a toss in the general direction of a vacant chair.

Obeying a gestured command from their leader, the others resumed their seats; but remained leaning tensely forward with their arms resting on the table.

Turning toward Lemos, Abe continued, "If the maountain won't come tew Mahomet — reckon that you've met up with the quotation in your reading, Tom. Anyhaow, hit's a nice evening fer a walk, and hyar I am."

He extended his big hand in a cordial manner, and, when the other ignored the greeting, let it fall and rest upon the shoulder of the agitator.

"I'm right glad tew see you ag'in, Tom. Hit's been fifteen or sixteen years since I last saw you, I reckon. You war 'da leetla Tomasso' then, and I used tew tote you araound on my shoulder. Remember?"

"Yuh, I remembera, a'right," responded Lemos shortly. He, too, spoke in the mountain manner, but his rich, vibrant voice still held a trace of the softening Italian dialect. Then his dark eyes flashed, his hand, stretched out on the table, clenched. "You war one uv us, then, Aba Blount! You belong tew da union yourself, but naow—"

Both of his shapely hands were flung out, and he lifted his shoulder with a gesture of contempt.

"Naow the only Union I below tew is the United States uv Ameriky, my boy. And, with all hits faults, hits still a pretty good one."

Lemos bared his white, even teeth with a sneering smile.

"No. You belonga, body and soul, tew the Operators, the oppressors. Bah! You're a turna-coat, Abe Blount. Who elected you State's Attorney? Burke Malley — you'd never have got hit widaout hees help."

Still unruffled, Abe replied, "Some one's been handin' aout misinformation tew you, Tom. Mr. Malley didn't enter intew the affair at all, and, as fer my bein' a 'turn-coat,' the only livery I'm wearing at present is the Law's — although I've got tew admit that this hyar rig don't look exactly like the robes uv Justice."

"'Justice!'" The other echoed the word bitterly. "Huh! Justice that's-a bought and paid for by the rich — the corporations — like hit always is! Thar is no real justice, naow, in disa country. I wrote-a

you —"

"I know, I know. 'Your's uv even date received and contents noted.' But hit takes two tew be in agreement, as well as tew make a quarrel, Tom, and I tuck the liberty uv holdin' a different opinion as tew whether thar was anything tew discuss. I hain't askin' you-all tew smoke a pipe uv peace, exactly; but jest tew talk over the whole situation over a friendly seegar."

Abe plunged his hand into a breast pocket, produced half a dozen cigars of an expensive make and shoved them out on the table. None of the miners moved to

accept the offering and he smiled, whimsically.

"They hain't pizoned," he said, "and they're aout uv a box uv the best that the Iron Maountain Company's money could buy — generally reserved fer the Directors uv that iniquitous corporation. Yes, they were a present tew me; but not a bribe — the President was kind enough tew remark that he knew I was incorruptible — and I'm passin' 'em along on the same

understandin'. Come, light up. You boys kin regard 'em as spoils uv war, taken from the enemy, if you're still mistrustful uv my own intentions."

"'Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes," quoted the

Italian, glibly.

The phrase, a handy one for a professional agitator, represented the sum total of his acquaintance with the Latin classics.

Abe's smile broadened as he observed the blank expression on the faces of the other four, and heard one of them mutter, "Aw, cut out the Dago, and talk American."

"Fiddlesticks, Tom! I hain't Greek, nor an enemy uv yourn — yet. That's why I'm daown hyar tew see if we kain't pour a leetle coal oil on the troubled waters and prevent their turnin' intew a 'tide,' and overflowin' their proper banks. I hain't opposed tew you-all, nor tew what you're fightin' for. Wasn't I a miner myself, once, and hain't I got reason tew know what a hard life the miner leads? I hain't sayin' that thar's not considerable tew be said on the other side, too; but I hain't hyar tew say hit. All that I'm interested in is that both sides stay within the law."

"And what make-a you think we hain't a-goin'

tew?" demanded Lemos, belligerently.

"Didn't say I thought so. I hope tew the Lord that you will, Tom. But the contrary's happened several times in the past, and human experience seems tew indicate that what's occurred once, may again. Well, I shouldn't love fer hit tew happen hyar-abaouts, especially while I'm State's Attorney and charged with the defense of the law."

"The law," repeated Lemos, in the same tone of bitter sarcasm which he had employed in echoing the word "Justice." "Your law is to-day as much-a a

tyrant as was George-a the Fifth in 1775. Personal Liberty is dead! Thomas Jefferson wrote—"
"Yes, I know. American history's one uv my hob-

bies, too. The trouble with orators uv your type is that you grab a quotation aout uv hits context and use hit regardless. Uv course a people has the right tew revolt and take up arms against oppression; but not until they've exhausted every legal and peaceful means tew the end. This country's grown tew be a democracy; the majority kin change hits laws - yes, even hits form of government — if they like, by means uv the ballot. The danger lies in the fact that some red-hot reformers want tew get quicker action by substitutin' bullets for ballots. Educatin' the majority, and then trustin' hit tew act right, takes tew long tew suit them. Well, maybe aour Uncle Samuel is ailin', some, but the bullet treatment hain't what he needs; hit's too likely tew end like the operation which was a great success — but the patient died. I hain't sayin' that it don't act gooselike, in some respects; but hit's the goose that lays the golden eggs — which is why most uv us Americans air over hyar. And thar's certainly no sense in any uv us gittin' all het up and dewin' something which may kill hit. The people --"

Lemos sprang to his feet, hands clenched and black eyes kindling.

"The people are the geese — a flock uv geese driven by the Big-a Interests, like the Mine Operators. What chance — what chance, in God's name, have we —?"

Without raising his voice Abe interrupted, "The same chance as any folks workin' for a Cause. Lastin', worthwhile changes generally come slow. The people have tew be educated up tew them. If a Cause is right, hit'll win aout, in the end, every time, bekaise the majority will come tew recognize hits rightness.

But many a good one has been hurted, and had hits progress delayed, by premature action, especially violent action. Thar's no better way uv injurin' your cause than by defyin' the law, and turnin' law-abidin' people agin you as a result."

"That's fine-a preachin'," scoffed Lemos. "But what abaout your great-a man, Abraham Lincoln? He fought for a Cause; he made-a war against the oppressors who kept human beings in slavery. And we—we miners—are slaves, to-day. Just slaves uv the rich!"

Again he thrust out his clenched fists, with his slender wrists pressed together as though bound by invisible manacles.

"Got your history wrong again, Tom. Lincoln didn't resort tew arms until all possible peaceful methods had been exhausted, and then hit wasn't tew free the slaves, but tew save the Union. He fought in defense of hits basic law, the Constitution; not tew destroy anything, but tew preserve. He believed in the abolition uv slavery through legislation, brought abaout by education, even if hit should take a long time. Tew be sure, the slaves were eventually freed as a war measure, but —"

"Well, hit was the war that freed the slaves, just as hit was war that freed the French from their oppressors uv the nobility. Sanctissima Maria, is not the lesson uv history plain, then?" cried Lemos.

Again his eyes flashed and he flung his arms wide, as though he were breaking their imaginary bonds, as he continued. His burst of invective was addressed to the State's Attorney, but obviously meant more for local consumption.

"You was in the Great-a War, Aba Blount! You fought against Prussian feudalism! Well, we fight against Industrial feudalism, hyar, to-day. Thar is

no difference. Those men - those forces uv Greed that profiteered withaout-a shame against their own-a country, during the Great-a War — are now, as they have always been, brutally, mercilessly, tryin' tew crush Labor. They have-a their money, their courts, their inhuman mine guards, and they use them all tew grind us daown, daown, tew make us labor like animals for a chance merely tew live in misery. For, whatever may happen, hit is they who are tew blame! Not us." He pounded his breasts with his fists, passionately. "Distrust, bitterness, hatred — it is they who have-a created them among us. Do not we, slaves in all but name, toil for less than a living wage, at constant risk of life and limb, that they may live in luxury with their cars, yachts, women? And have-a we even security in that employment, and the little wage that they begrudgingly give us - crumbs swept from the rich-a man's table? No! Dio mio, No! We are at their mercy. We work when they please; we stop when they say, 'enough.' Are we not also men, with feelings? Or are we tew be driven cattle, withaout rights? You are a lawyer, Aba Blount. Have we not the right tew combine for aour own protection? Is not the right uv collective action and bargaining fundamental? Yet even this they would deny us, if they could!"

CHAPTER III

THE GAUGE OF BATTLE

THE conclusion of Dago Lemos' harangue found his four companions leaning tensely forward again, with the gleam of battle in their eyes. One pounded his heavy fist down upon the table. Another burst out with, "That's right, Dago. That's the truth, by God!"

Only the State's Attorney remained unmoved. He had taken a chair, uninvited, and lay stretched out in it, with his hands thrust deep in the pockets of his breeches, his legs extended far under the table. There was a quizzical half-smile on his lips as he drawled, "Bravissimo, Tom! You'd ought tew be in politics, yourself. That was a vote-makin' speech, and hit saounded right convincin'. Only I wasn't convinced. I reckon the trouble with me is that I am a lawyer, and have acquired the distressin' habit uv seein' both sides uv a case. Sometimes I almost wish that I war like the farmer who got hisself elected Trial Justice in a country court. Maybe you know the yarn, but I'll spin hit, anyhaow. Hit war his first trial, and, as soon as the plaintiff's case was put in, the Justice promptly faound for him. 'But,' cried the defendant's attorney, jumping tew his feet, 'Your Honor hain't heerd the testimony on aour side, yet.' 'Don't want tew,' replied the Court. 'I'm afeered that, if I dew, hit'll mix me all up and I won't know which way tew decide.'

"Thar was a lot uv truth in what you've said, Tom—and a lot that war only half-truths, also. And half-truths air dangerous things tew make up your mind on, especially in serious matters. What folks don't know

never does as much harm as what they know that hain't so. Besides, one shouldn't pass judgment on a fifty percent basis, the way the school teacher did when he passed the pupil who'd been in the same class for three years withaout learnin' anything. Hold on a minute. Hit's a good story, and I want tew git hit off my chest. Story tellin' is another weakness uv mine. Well, the boy's paw came daown to school on examination day tew see if something couldn't be done abaout gittin' his boy through. Said the teacher, 'I'm jest as plumb tired uv havin' him araound as you air, and I'll pass him this time if he gits fifty percent on his exam.' Well, he wrote aout two questions for the boy tew answer, and when he got the paper back and looked hit over he turned tew the kid's paw and announced that he'd passed. 'So he did answer one of them right?' asked the pleased parent. 'Yes,' said the teacher. 'I asked him first when Columbus discovered America, and he answered, "In 1620." That was obviously wrong, uv course. Then I asked him what Dinosauria were, and his answer was absolutely right.' 'Really? What was hit? 'inquired the other, and the teacher replied, 'He wrote, "I don't know! "","

For just an instant the suggestion of a fleeting smile appeared on Lemos' face, but it vanished as quickly, and he responded, "This hain't no time for jokin', Aba Blount."

"Think not? Naow I'd say that thar's mighty few times that hain't right for a leetle joke, Tom. A mutual laugh has spread the oil uv good feeling on many a troubled water, and helped pass off many a crisis. But, if you're dead sot on bein' unfriendly, I'll try tew be serious for a few minutes, and talk straight, for we've got tew come tew one kind uv an understanding, anyway, Lemos. Thar air laws in this country and this

caounty which air not goin' tew be disregarded, if I can help hit. You-all have a legal right tew strike, and I'm not naow interested in the question uv whether or not you're morally justified in exercising hit, naow — I didn't come over hyar tew j'ine in a debate. You also have the legal right tew dew all the unionizing you can, provided you don't employ intimidation or threats of violence against the non-union miners who want tew stick tew their jobs. On the other hand, the mine owners have acted within their legal rights in gittin' aout injunctions agin your dewin' those things, and —"

"And naow you've-a joined with the other mine guards, thugs and gunmen — Hessian hirelings — that the Operators pay tew prevent us from using a weapon which may mean-a the difference between victory and defeat! Maybe hit's not a pretty one, but the end justifies the means. Men are leavin' the Iron Maountain Mines daily and joinin' aour ranks in this-a fight for Industrial freedom. Dew you think we're goin' tew stand supinely by and see their places filled with scabs, money-grabbers, whose price is the bread aout uv our children's maouths? Haow many makea-believe officers uv the law - Deputy Sheriffs hired and paid by the Operators - have you got tew help you crucify freedom?" demanded Lemos with a sneer.

"Well, naow, I wouldn't say that the protection of life and property was 'crucifyin' freedom'; but, if you insist on puttin' hit that way, my answer'd be 'not any more than we need,' I reckon. But I don't want you tew git me wrong, Lemos. I don't believe in the system uv mine guards any more than you dew; hit's a present evil and a continuing menace. Haowever, they're a fact, and they dew represent the paower of the law in these mines, for they're sworn officers. And hit's almighty dangerous business tew act with violence against them, and the law behind them. What I'm anxious tew git is your promise that you won't start anything uv the kind, hyar, and that you will obey the injunctions which have been served on the United Mine Workers. That's all I'm interested in, for the moment. And I'm not representing the mine owners, but the Law."

"Yes, the mine owners' law! You know which side your bread is buttered on, all-a right, Aba Blount; you're just like the rest who get a leetle authority. Well, I won't give-a you that promise! What dew you think uv that? And what you goin' tew dew abaout

hit?"

Lemos sprang to his feet and stood leaning forward with eyes burning into those of the State's Attorney. His face was chalky-white, except for two crimson spots over the cheek bones. The others also stood up, except Abe, who remained as he was, apparently unaware of the ring of menacing faces about him. Upon his own countenance there was a look of weariness and sorrow. For a moment he did not answer. Then he spoke in the same quiet tone.

"What am I goin' tew dew? I'm sure I don't know, except that I'm goin' tew defend the law tew the best

uv my ability, God helpin' me."

He arose, picked his hat up from the floor, and stood for a moment facing Lemos calmly. The latter's eyes were the first to fall.

"Well, we've had aour leetle discussion, anyway. I'm right sorry that I hain't been able tew make you see things my way, but at least we understand each other. Good night, boys. Better think over what I said."

Abe stepped out into the darkness. As he crossed the threshold, the burly miner drew his revolver and

started to follow, but Lemos checked him. "No. Hit won't dew, Bill. They know that he came daown hyar, and if anything happened tew him thar'd be hell tew pay."

"Yes, I failed. Well, I hardly expected tew be successful; but at least aour talk has cleared the air of the mists of uncertainty. Each side knows just where the other stands, naow."

It was two hours later, and Abe was in conference with the officers of the Iron Mountain Mine Company, in the small local office of the corporation. He continued, "What I told them might have given the others pause, but Tom Lemos isn't the easily frightened kind; he's been fighting too long. He knows haow much is at stake right hyar, and I'll miss my guess if he doesn't play his hand for all it's worth. That means action, and aggressive action, on his part."

"You think that he'll have 'em actually attack us?"

demanded the manager.

"Yes. Just put yourself in his place. It means a tremendous lot tew the strikers tew have this mine closed daown, not only because its production is a material item, but because of the psychological effect that it would have through the whole region. They probably won't deliberately set aout tew shoot us up, although I wouldn't gamble on what might happen if they get a good start — you know haow they feel towards the new men which you have brought in hyar; the scabs, as they call 'em. But it's a safe bet that they will try tew wreck your machinery, and burn you aout, generally. And, if I'm not mightily mistaken, it'll happen soon, probably to-morrow night. They know, naow, that the law, as represented by yours truly, is theoretically ready tew back you up, at least

tew the extent of safeguarding lives, property and the miners' right tew work, and the longer they delay the greater will be the chance for us to make adequate preparations against attack."

"Why not to-morrow morning, then?"

"No. A night attack is the natural thing. Occurring in the dark, it would throw a greater scare intew your workmen, and, moreover, the attackers would be less likely tew be recognized and arrested later. It'll be at night, and I'll bet my hat twenty-four hours from naow."

"Whew!" The manager passed his hand across his perspiring forehead. "What are you going to do about it?"

It was not "what are we going to do?"

"That's exactly what Dago Lemos asked me, when he practically threw down the gauge of battle. I answered, then, that I didn't know. I dew know, naow. Where's your telephone operator?" A young man stepped briskly forward. "Get me the capital, Executive Mansion. I want tew speak with the Governor, personally, and it's up tew you tew get him, even if he's sick a-bed."

"Yes, sir."

The operator had been in the army, and knew how to take orders where no excuses went. After he had put in the long-distance call the others sat and smoked, or paced the room and smoked, seldom speaking even to each other, after Abe had failed to answer two or three questions. He had fallen into a brown study. After what seemed to the rest an interminable time, the telephone bell rang, and faintly over the singing wire came the words, "The Governor will speak to State's Attorney Blount. Put your party on the line." "Hello? Is this the Governor? This is Abe Blount

speaking — oh, I'm dewing pretty well, thanks — yes — I called up regarding the strike situation, hyar, Governor — yes, getting kind of torrid —"

For five minutes the one-sided conversation, as far as the listeners in the office were concerned, continued. Then Abe said, "Yes, Your Excellency, I will take all of the responsibility. Thank you. Good-night."

Night had come again. There was no moon, but the sky was clear and star-lit. At the Iron Mountain mine those who had labored in the bowels of the earth, like ants, all day, had retired to their crowded cottages, to sleep the sleep of physical weariness untroubled by phantasies of the brain. Lacking imagination, they were kept awake by no stalking fears of an attack upon them, and they had been strictly guarded from all rumors of what probably impended. Nothing out of the ordinary had occurred during the day, and only the mine guards knew what the night might bring forth. They, however, were all awake and alert and two of their number, ex-service men, had been detailed by the State's Attorney to steal up the mountain-side, into the new No-Man's Land, and keep watch for the first sight or sound of an attack from the enemy's camp on the farther side. If it should eventuate, they were under orders to signal the fact by means of a pocket flashlight, and then return as silently and quickly as possible.

A few drowsy lights still shone, here and there, in the cottage windows, but one after another these eyes were closed, as their owners sought their beds. Finally but one room remained illuminated, the little office where Abe and the company officials sat, with windows wide open to the balmy spring air, talking in low tones; listening and watching the darkened hillside constantly.

If the attack should materialize in accordance with Abe's prophecy, they were prepared for it, they felt; but if anything went wrong —

An hour passed; two. The silence out of doors remained unbroken save for the usual night sounds and the steady murmur of the near-by creek. The watchful waiting began to get on the nerves of some of them. They smoked incessantly, and talked the same; all except Abe, who stood by the window and gazed up at the black hillside. From base to summit the land had once been his ancestral acres. The cabin where his mother had been born and lived her carefree girlhood, until cast out by a cruel moral code, had once stood on almost the exact spot where he was now standing. Why should he be there, defending the property which had, to all intents and purposes, been filched from his family by the company which now owned it, and in whose pay Lemos had declared him to be? For a bare instant the thought passed through his mind, "If the impending attack should be successful the corporation will suffer heavy financial loss. Might it not be retribution for past evils, the responsibility for which lies at its doors?" He banished the idea with a somewhat bitter smile, and half-whispered, "That's enough of that; you must be getting a case of nerves, too, Abe Blount." Yet the feeling of strangeness and unreality persisted for a time, and he found himself speculating, in a detached sort of way, on the impersonality of the Law and of Duty. One who obeys their dictates must needs be prepared at time to oppose the friend and protect the foe, regardless of personal considerations.

"It's too dark, to-night. They won't come now . . . and I don't believe that they ever will," finally exclaimed the Manager, with relief and disappointment curiously mingled in his tone. Somewhat peevishly,

he added, "H-l, the everlasting waiting, waiting, waiting, is getting my goat!"

"Don't give up hope. We may all 'git aourselves shotted 'to-night yet," smiled Abe. "Seriously, I'm almost dead certain that they'll come, especially since that guard sent back word that he had almost run plumb into an enemy's spy, watching us from the top of the maountain. The darkness won't stop 'em. They can use torches in climbing the other side, and there are lights enough daown hyar tew guide them after they come 'over the top.' Perhaps they're waiting for us tew close up shop and go home. Let's see what giving the appearance of having done so will produce."

He pulled down the shades to the windows on the easterly side of the office and stepped outside the door to continue his watch for the expected signal flash.

It came, a very few moments later, almost as though in answer to his challenge. Abe and the others, who had been standing beside him, ran back into the office, and the State's Attorney cried, boyishly, "The play's abaout tew begin! Hyar goes the curtain."

He stepped to the end window which faced down the mountain pass, and pulled down and raised its shade, three times. A quarter of a mile or more distant, at the point where the spur track disappeared from daylight view around a shoulder of the hill to the North, a trainman's lantern answered the signal, and a moment later came the sound of a crescendo rumble and rattle as a long string of apparently empty coal cars followed their blustering little engine around the curve and headed down the track toward the mine. They had lain there, just out of sight, for several hours, lest their earlier appearance should evoke the curiosity of some miner who might be friendly to the strikers' forces. On it came, now, at a crawling pace which occasionally ceased with a jerk, to be resumed again with much jangling and grinding while the little engine panted from its exertions, quite as though it were nothing more than what it appeared to be—a train of "empties" returning to the mine to be in readiness for the morrow's loading. It came to a final stop on the siding beneath the tipple at the main minehead; the crew ran about, uncoupling the engine, swinging their lanterns and calling out to one another in everyday tones. Then they, too, departed to their bunk house, entered and closed the door.

Silence again. Now the group which stood in the darkness on the office steps, behind the new sectional rampart of steel cars, could from time to time catch faint sound from up the mountain-side, which their imaginations magnified into the tread of a small but determined army making its way downward through the forest, bearing weapons of destruction — torch and dynamite, revolver and rifle.

The intermittent sounds multiplied, and then suddenly ceased entirely. There came a hush, a tense moment for the watchers, who guessed that the advancing force had paused to assume some rude formation and receive its last orders before the final rush across the cleared stretch at the base of the mountain, the planned surprise assault upon the sleeping camp, which was to arouse the hated "scabs" from their illearned slumber and drive them, mad with terror, into the night, while the darkness should be filled with shouts, the crash of explosives, the lurid flames of burning homes.

Then from the hillside came a cry, in a voice which Abe Blount recognized instantly. It was some hundred yards away, but not so distant that the note of fanatic hate in it was lost. A hundred other excited voices caught up the shout, and simultaneously the edge of the wood burst into flaring light, and the illumination from many torches disclosed a line of dark forms, alike grotesque and menacing, as they charged noisily downward across the stubbly ground.

"God!" gasped the manager, as he clutched Abe's

arm. "If anything goes wrong —"

The suspended sentence was scarcely out of his mouth before the answer came with dramatic suddenness. Yet, like most startling dénouements, it had been planned out with minute care, in advance.

The apparently empty coal cars sprang into sharp relief under the glare from acetylene torches, simultaneously lighted, and there stood revealed a double line of soldierly forms, clad in khaki, wearing shallow-crowned helmets of steel and armed with rifles — a full company of National Guardsmen, sent by his Excellency, the Governor, to meet the threatened crisis.

The commander uttered a crisp command, the rifles flashed up to the horizontal, and the crash of a volley aimed toward the mountain top echoed back from it,

sending a sharp thrill through the watchers.

The ragged line of advancing strikers stopped in their tracks, in consternation and surprise which held them for an instant voiceless. Then a medley of oaths and shouts broke forth, mingled with startled cries and excited questions from many a window in the surrounding cabins. The voices of the mine guards joined in the clamor as they ordered the miners to get back, in no gentle tones.

Again the command and rifle crash! This time tiny spurts of dust appeared on the mountain-side not so many yards in front of the attackers. Their line wavered, broke and began to move backwards, in spots precipitately, in others with rebellious slowness. Fists

and torches were shaken in impotent wrath, and curses rained down upon the soldiery.

A third volley, aimed a little higher, and the last torch was flung to the ground, the last striker turned

and ran madly for the cover of the forest.

Then, and not until then, the renewed darkness on the mountain-side was pierced with flashes as the disappointed attackers, carried away by anger and disappointment, turned and fired a number of shots at random. For luck the soldiers let drive a fourth round, and then, laughing and shouting like schoolboys on a lark, piled out of the cars where they had been lying cramped up, and made for the office, whither they were called to celebrate the victory with coffee and sandwiches.

There they found the State's Attorney the center of an excited, hilarious group of officials and guards, every one of whom was insisting on shaking his hand and slapping him on the back, while they all talked at once.

During a momentary let-up in the jabber, the manager was heard, saying, "— like clockwork. Our plans were absolutely perfect, and I'll tell the cock-eyed world that we handed 'em a jolt, this time."

It was "our" and "we," now.

Abe smiled, a trifle soberly.

"Well, I shouldn't be surprised if a few maountain climbing records were being busted, abaout naow. What happened ought tew put the fear of God intew 'em for a while, but to-morrow I think that I'll supplement the bullets with a billet tew my friend Lemos, not with any idea of rubbing it in, but just as a hint that, although the reception committee may be changed a little, it will continue in readiness for any future calls. The company should be able tew raound up a consider-

able number of extra guards and ship them up hyar, within a few days, and the effect of to-night's entertainment won't wear off for *that* long, over yonder."

"Right! Say, what are you so serious about? You look about as cheerful as though we had taken the lick-

ing," declared the manager.

"Fiddlesticks! Of course I'm mighty glad the way things turned aout, and especially that we gained a bloodless victory, from all appearances. But I can't help feeling sorry that it was necessary tew win it in this way. It was necessary, I know that; lives and property had tew be protected, the law upheld. But it's bad business, this having tew oppose force tew force, this resorting tew arms tew uphold the law or settle arguments between factions in a civilized community, especially arguments between Capital and Labor — which is a much abused and misleading term, in my opinion. It confesses a failure in Democracy. It's like sowing dragons' teeth."

"Oh, piffle, yourself!" retorted the manager. "You sound like Admiral Sampson with his, 'Don't cheer, boys, the poor devils are dying.' Let 'em die, I say. You're great on spouting Shakespeare — didn't he write something like 'Those who take the sword shall perish by the sword?' What's that? Out of the Bible, was it? So much the better, although I didn't think I knew any quotations from that. Oh, well, go ahead and moralize, if you like. I suppose it's natural after a war is over, and — Say, what's the matter with your

face?"

He pointed, and Abe raised his hand to his cheek. It came away smeared with blood.

"Well, that's funny, naow," he said. "I heard a bullet zip past my ear, but didn't realize that it gave me a close shave on the way. Reckon I must have

been more excited than I thought. That makes twice I've been nicked — once at each extremity. Wonder where I'll get the inevitable third, according tew superstition?" He laughed as he began to stanch the slight flow of blood with his handkerchief; but, when the excited exclamations broke out afresh, he became serious, and interrupted with the words, "Dew me a favor, boys, and keep this scratch dark. I don't want the newspapers tew be making a wounded hero aout of me, again, for it's darned nonsense. Somebody pass me a cup of coffee and a hot dog, will you?"

CHAPTER IV

THE CREST OF THE WAVE

Two days later the State's Attorney went to Cumberland City for an important conference, and, as he stepped from the train in the late afternoon, the first persons whom he saw were Congressman Clayton and his daughter. Indeed, Marion Clayton caught sight of him first, called to him, and, when she learned that he was planning to stay over night in the city, insisted that he make their home his stopping place. Abe would like to have refused, for he was tired and had a premonition that, if he went with them, he would have little rest during the evening. But he did not know how to refuse, and Miss Clayton put an early end to his hesitation by throwing open the door of the sedan which she was driving and bidding him get in beside her father. The two men shook hands cordially.

Without waiting for the Congressman to say more than a word of greeting to their guest, Marion cried, "Oh, have you seen yesterday's papers yet? No? Well, just wait until we get home. I've saved them all, for the stories abaout you are simply thrilling. My, but I'm praoud, acting as chauffeur for a hero and a Congressman, simultaneously."

"But I'm not a Congressman, yet," smiled Abe, and she retorted, "Who said that you were? Almost anybody — even dad — can be one of those things, but a real hero is quite a different matter. Oh, don't try tew look so modest. Of course modesty becomes you and is what one would expect, in your case, but just wait until you see haow the press have pictured you!"

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"Dew we pass a hat store on the way tew the haouse?" inquired the object of her remarks.

"No; but, if your head should be enlarged, you can borrow one of dad's hats," replied the girl, flippantly. "Isn't he too impressive for anything as he acknowl-

edges the salutes of the bourgeois?"

Indeed, Mr. Clayton had an impressive way of responding to the bows and hand waves of passing pedestrians who recognized him. Once their car was held up for a moment at a busy street crossing, where quite a crowd was collected on the sidewalk, and some one called the general attention to the presence of the State's Attorney, whereupon a spontaneous cheer broke out. Abe felt himself growing red and tried to shrink farther back, out of sight. The Congressman laughed, pushed him forward into view and nodded and smiled towards him, the crowd responding with a second cheer.

"You see, Marion was right, as usual," he said. "You, not I, are the cynosure of all eyes to-day. Capitalize it, my boy. Popularity is as fleeting as Time, and, like it, should be seized by the forelock. Drop me at the next corner, please, dear. Being forced to play second fiddle has put my nose aout of joint—and I've also got something tew attend tew at the office. I'll walk home, humbly, and be there in time for dinner. We men won't bother to dress, for, from the size of Abe's bag, I assume that he didn't come provided with his 'soup to nuts.'"

"I don't own one," said the State's Attorney, unashamed.

Marion chatted volubly and entertainingly, during the rest of the ride, and, when they had reached the imposing southern mansion where those by the name of Clayton had lived for generations, and a colored maid with a vast expanse of ivory teeth had departed to carry his bag to one of the guest chambers, she led him into the library, and thrust into his hands a bundle of newspapers.

"There," she said, "Read, mark, learn and inwardly digest those, Sir David. I've got tew run along and make myself presentable. Of course, we'll dine en famille, as daddy said, but at present I'm a sight."

"There are sights, and sights," responded Abe, with

sincere appreciation.

Indeed, the girl, in her tailored brown motoring suit, with hat, gloves, silk stockings, and shoes to match, and all to match her hair, now slightly disordered by the wind which had blown roses into her cheeks, made an effective picture of fashionable Southern womanhood.

"Don't try to turn flatterer, sir; it doesn't come nat-

ural."

Marion ran gayly from the room, and, after Abe had gazed curiously around at the expensive and tasteful furnishings, and especially at the bookcases filled with hundreds of finely bound volumes, which showed few signs of wear and tear, he applied himself to the marked articles in the papers.

After reading the first one, he laughed, and thought, "I wish I knew whether or not I'd be making an unpardonable social error if I lit up my pipe. I enjoy

fiction twice as much when I'm smoking."

He decided not to take the chance, but nevertheless chuckled frequently as he skimmed over the other stories of the bloodless battle of which he had been the hero; all of them agreed on that point, most of them referred to Preacher Billy's allegory and called him "Our David," and one added a biographical sketch which the writer had made highly entertaining by sup-

plying from a vivid imagination what he lacked in actual knowledge of the facts.

The last one ended with, "We may all well share with our neighboring county the pride which it justly takes in its chief Law Officer. His well-known personal bravery, the promptness with which he met the recent emergency, and the skill with which he handled a situation fraught with the gravest dangers and consequences have now made him a figure of state, if not nationwide, interest, for the coal strike affects the entire country and the eyes of all are turned on the coal fields where the battle is being so desperately fought. Abe Blount's action was, on a smaller scale, like that of Theodore Roosevelt, and if the nation had a few more like him in authority, to-day, the United Miners of America would not be able long to cripple a vital industry."

"Hurray!" exclaimed Abe, half-aloud. "That editor heard his master's voice, all right. He's tied me up tighter'n a drum as the special champion of the Interests, or thinks he has."

"State's Attorney Blount," the article concluded, "has proved himself both efficient and faithful over a few things, and it will be strange, indeed, if time does not make him master over many. From now on he is a marked man, politically, and in line for rapid advancement."

He had barely finished his reading when Marion Clayton danced back into the room, appearing like an incarnate vision of The Springtime of Life. Her gown was extremely simple, a clinging white shimmering affair, girdled high. Her hair had received attention from the dusky, but expert, fingers of her maid, and the studied simplicity of its arrangement, coupled with the deliberate omission of jewelry from her bare arms

and neck, made her appear not only charmingly sweet but surprisingly youthful —" almost as girlish as Omie Gayheart," thought Abe, who found himself wondering how the child of the mountains would fit into his present environment. It was merely a passing thought, for he was suddenly rather ill at ease, alone with this exquisite society girl in her city home, amid surroundings indicative of wealth and social refinement.

The feeling, however, did not prevent his frank and sincere admiration from showing forth in his gaze, and, as accustomed as Marion Clayton was to Southern eye and lip flattery, she felt herself flush a little. The unusual sense of embarrassment caused her to laugh a little artificially, as she indicated the pile of newspapers, and said, "Well, what dew you think of them, especially the editorial?"

"Wonderful! Who is the fellow that they're making such a fuss abaout? I didn't recognize him."

"Oh, of course you'd make fun of your fame, it's like you," retorted the girl. "Just the same, I'll bet that you were pleased tew be able to see yourself as others see you, and find that the regard is so flattering, no, 'commendatory' is a better word, I reckon. I'm personally as proud as Punch on account of my distinguished friend and present guest." She made him an elaborate curtsey. "And the best part of it is that it's deserved, Abe. You'll let me call you Abe, won't you? "

"Of course! Why shouldn't you? — everybody does."

"Why not, indeed, since we're real friends. And don't forget that it works both ways. I'm tew be plain 'Marion' to you."

"You couldn't be - 'plain,' I mean. But Marion it is, if you say the word."

"I suppose that we should shake on that," she laughed, and they clasped hands heartily. "And naow let's talk abaout you. It isn't often that I have a chance for a tête-à-tête with a real live hero. Haow does it feel to have people cheer you, and have the

newspapers praise you tew the skies?"

"Well, it strikes me that the cheers were pretty feeble, and the stories pretty foolish. The papers have tew fill up space, somehaow, and, in this case, it's easy tew guess from whom they took their cue. In helping tew protect lives and property, I happened tew dew a favor tew the Coal crowd, and while their gratitude is still warm they're rewarding me by anointing my head with the oil of flattery, poured on a bit thick, and probably for a reason. Perhaps I shouldn't have said that, for it saounds both ungrateful and pessimistic, but - well, praise is a coin that doesn't set the spender back anything, yet frequently has a high purchasing paower, as everybody knows. As for the yells, that incident was merely a sample, on a mighty small scale, of what Roosevelt called 'public hysteria,' and it doesn't mean anything. A man who'd get puffed up by a little 'wind' like that would be a toy balloon, and I hope I'm not one. I just had a piece of luck which landed me, sitting pretty, on the crest of a wave, but waves pass and each is followed by a trough, intew which a man often drops aout of the public eye in a hurry. If I can keep from getting tew feel too high and mighty, naow, perhaps I won't be so greatly cast doawn, when I fall intew mine."

"That may be good philosophy, but I don't believe that you're going tew fall. Don't you remember what dad said abaout you, when we met you up at that fascinating Smiling Pass?" "Is he really seriously thinking of quitting public life?"

"Well, of course I don't know, for sure; but he talks a lot abaout dewing it. I'll miss Washington, fearfully," she added. "The life there may be artificial, but it certainly gets intew the blood, in time. You see I went there when I was — gracious I almost gave myself away, then, for, of course, you know haow long daddy has been in Congress."

"And a woman's age is one secret which she must and can keep."

Abe's eyes twinkled.

"Precisely! Her years, like her ears, must never be uncovered to any one except members of her immediate family. That's axiomatic, naowadays."

The breezy arrival of Mr. Clayton, and the summons to dinner which followed almost immediately, put an end to their dialogue. Abe was obliged to describe, in detail, the happenings at the Iron Mountain mine; but as soon as possible he changed the conversation. National and State politics were discussed to some extent, but Marion Clayton early insisted that she was tired of hearing her father "talk shop" everlastingly, and, to his surprise and relief, Abe found himself heartily enjoying an evening of informal sociability, storytelling and music, for his hostess played the piano well, and sang pleasingly, if with a voice which showed more careful training than natural quality.

That night he slept the sleep of healthy tiredness on a mahogany bed with box spring and tufted mattress, between sheets of the finest linen and in a bedroom perfectly appointed. The next morning he enjoyed the unaccustomed luxury of shaving and taking a shower in his own private bathroom, spotless in shining tile and enamel, and, on taking his leave, soon after a bountiful Southern breakfast, he said, with perfect sincerity, that he had never enjoyed an overnight stay so much. In return the Claytons insisted that he make their home his own as frequently as possible.

His home! As Abe Blount walked, alone, the few blocks from the Clayton house to the business building where his morning conference was to be held, he suffered a pang of homesickness for what he did not have, and probably never would have in the fullest sense of the word. It was all the more acute because of his helplessness and hopelessness. Well, at least he could and would make the most of what life did hold for him in that respect, and not forfeit his membership in The Legion of the Cheerful.

With the thought came again the recollection of Omie, youthful, natural, unsophisticated; the soul of mischief and merriment, yet the possessor of a real purpose. The memory of the child-woman, whom he had not seen for almost a year, completely effaced, for the time, that of the one whom he had just left and who had really made a strong impression upon him, as could not well have been otherwise. How fine and sweet a little comrade the mountain girl had been, to be sure! And how eager she had been for him to build a stealaway place at Smiling Pass. He would build it, without further delay, and make it as nearly a real home as might be, a little cottage wholly unlike the mansion which he had just quitted, but for that very reason better suited to his present need, and perhaps forever more befitting his mode of life and simple tastes.

Abe was the first of the conferees to arrive at the office of the State's Attorney for that county, and, under the powerful sweep of desire, he forgot his habitual antipathy to letter writing, borrowed pen, paper and ink from the stenographer and scrawled a brief but enthusiastic note to Omie.

"Dear Chum [it ran]: I am certainly going to make youall at Smiling Pass a visit, if only a flying one, before another fortnight joins the ranks of the departed days, and I hope that you will have at least one set of plans drawn for my proposed hill-castle. I'm determined to build it, this summer, and 'the quicker the sooner.' (I knew a contractor, once, who had his business cards printed with the motto, 'Houses Built While You Wait.') As you will see by the heading on this paper I am in Cumberland City, and last night I had the unique pleasure of dining and sleeping at the home of a Congressman. A beautiful home it is, too; I wish that you might see it. The Claytons took their cue from the newspapers and made a hero of me, at the start, but I ended up more like one of the family, and few heroes long retain their glamor under such circumstances. Marion expressed a wish to be most cordially remembered to her friends at Smiling Pass, when I should see them again, and called you 'a dear.' Sincerely - no, affectionately, yours, Abe."

A day later Omie read this letter with strangely mingled feelings.

"What are you looking so doggone serious abaout, Abe; have you fallen in love?"

Virgil was the questioner. Two weeks had sped by and the State's Attorney had finally torn himself away from his crowding duties and come to spend a night with his friends at Smiling Pass. Now the little group were seated on the veranda before the House of Happiness, Abe, Virgil, Preacher Billy, Omie and Camille, waiting for the bell to summon them to supper. Again it was June and the time of the brief spring vacation at the school. Peace and quiet reigned, undisturbed,

and the special guest had lapsed into a deep reverie which made his homely countenance appear somber

and very weary.

Abe shook himself free of the spell which the quiet of the spot, following his enthusiastic greeting, had cast over him. With a hearty laugh he answered, "Not quite as bad as that. If I look serious it's because I've just taken a serious step, and perhaps put my foot in it. In short, friends and fellow countrymen, I've gone and went and done it."

"Done what, Abe?" demanded Omie.

She had grown physically and matured in many ways during the year that had passed, and their visitor had quickly marked the change and new reserve, with somewhat of a pang of disappointment, if the truth were known.

"Annaounced myself as a candidate for election tew Congress this fall."

"No!" "Hurray!" "Bully for you, Abe!"

Virgil and Billy sprang excitedly to their feet and fell upon him, shaking his hand and clapping him on the back, while Camille smiled and Omie threw her reserve to the mountain winds and danced about, her blue eyes shining, her breath coming fast. After all there was still much of the primitive in each of them.

"Oh, that's wonderful, Abe! I'm so praoud and

happy," cried the girl.

"Reckon there's nothing particularly 'wonderful' abaout running for Congress; almost anybody who wants tew can dew that. The wonder will occur if I get myself elected."

"Nonsense! You will be, of course you will. Why, think of what the newspapers have been saying, and the reputation you've made! With Congressman Clay-

ton helping —"

"If he does help," the candidate interrupted to amend.

"But he said that he would. We heard him, didn't we, Virge, Camille? He said that he wasn't going tew

run again, and -"

"Hold your horses! A witness is supposed tew tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, my child, and I'm afraid that you're letting the wish color your recollection. What Clay actually did say, as I recall it, was that he had abaout made up his mind tew quit political life, and that I might be the logical man tew succeed him in the job. We've got tew give the devil his due, you know — not meaning anything personal, of course. He may come through for me. I certainly hope so, for I'll admit that my decision was based in part, at least, on what he told us up hyar, and what I've heard elsewhere tew the same effect, but — Well, it's kind of funny. I wrote him that abaout a week ago, and he hasn't even acknowledged my letter, yet."

"If he should go back on what he said — and I don't care what you say, it was as good as a promise — he'll be the meanest man on earth," Omie retorted, hotly.

"Oh, no, he won't. I told you then that the guarded promises of a dyed-in-the-wool politician aren't intended tew be taken too seriously. Naturally I'd be considerably disappointed if he should decide tew exercise the privilege of a wise man, and change his mind, but —"

Preacher Billy interrupted this time.

"What air the other and real reasons fer your decidin' tew run, Abe? I'm plumb sartain that hit hain't fer the worldly glory uv the office, nor the money that's in hit, whatever."

CHAPTER V

THE DECISION

"THANKS, Billy; I hope you're right. Well, there is another reason. The election next fall is going tew be bitterly contested, and—"

"Where dew you get that stuff?" interjected Virgil, in army fashion. "Why, the Republican Party always wins, hands daown, in this District. It's traditional since we maountain people stuck by the Union in the Civil War. I know what the newspapers are saying, that this election is going tew be a Democratic landslide and sweep a bunch of Republicans aout of Congress, but I'll bet my shirt that it won't start up hyar."

"You're looking on the surface; I've been looking underneath it. Of course, whoever gets the nomination is reasonably certain tew win over the *Democratic* nominee; but, as sure as shooting, there's going tew be another party in the field, this election, and it'll put up a devil of a fight."

"You don't really mean tew say —?"

"If you're thinking 'Socialists' I most certainly dew! I still have a friend or two, even among the striking coal miners and they've furnished me with the information that Dago Lemos has sworn tew carry aour fight intew the political arena, and get even with me, and the Interests for which he assumes I was working, for the licking we handed him two weeks ago. He's red hot, and going at it with a zeal worthy of a better cause. Their platform will be one calculated tew appeal tew the ignorant — daown with the Interests, a square deal for the miner and the maountaineer, and licker for

every one! If he succeeds in getting all the eligible miners registered, and can drive or coax all of them, and a fair percentage of aour maountain people, tew the polls tew vote the ticket of the 'People's Party,' he'll play the very mischief in this District, which is so largely composed of maountains and mines. He has a big following in both camps, already, being half and half himself, and I can tell you that he's a mighty efficient organizer and effective speaker. It is just what I prophesied, a year ago, only the strike and that little affair at the Iron Maountain Mine have brought things tew a head even sooner than I expected.

"Naturally Tom's planning tew concentrate on the District and Caounty offices, which they stand a chance of winning, and he is himself tew head the slate as

candidate for Congress."

"Well, of all the nerve!" exclaimed Virgil, scof-

fingly.

"Oh, Lemos has plenty of that - you have tew have it tew mix in politics. But this is no laughing matter. What I'm particularly afraid of is that most of the regular voters will think that it is a joke, and fail tew go tew the polls and prove that their assumption was correct. The people have got tew be waked up, araoused tew the danger, and I'm a candidate because I believe that I realize the menace better than the average politician, who lives daown in one of the taowns, is likely tew. And I'm after the Congressional nomination because it interests the whole District, and the whole District is endangered. It will give me a wider field tew fight in, and a chance tew tell my story tew bigger audiences. The office of State's Attorney is only a Caounty one, and, although it's pretty important at the present time, there are plenty of men as good as, or better than, I am tew fill it. I want tew see their

entire slate wiped clean off, and I'm afraid that won't happen unless some one who recognizes the danger, and can fight it at its source, gets busy and stirs up public opinion. It isn't going tew be a fight between the Republican and Democratic Parties, or even the Republican, Democratic and *People's* Parties, so much as it is one of principles. Law and Order are at stake in this hill country, and the party which stands for those, as I believe aours does, is going tew need the strongest candidates that it can put intew the field if it is tew win and win decisively, which is absolutely essential. The new movement must be swept clean aout of these maountains, for, if it ever gets a real foothold up hyar—good-night! Perhaps I'm wrong in picking myself as the man—"

"You air thet man, Abe Blount! A man sent by Gawd Hisself tew meet the danger thet threatens us. I believe hit."

The mountain preacher spoke solemnly.

"Maybe, Bill. I wouldn't go quite that far, myself; but, if I get the nomination, I reckon that I'm going tew need His help, and yours as well."

"You shall have hit. You air a-goin' tew win. The Lord hain't a-goin' tew let the cause uv Righteousness

be tromped upon by the forces uv Iniquity."

"The right cause always triumphs in the end; but sometime He seems tew allow it tew get a paowerful lot of preliminary lickings, Billy. If Clayton were tew run again he'd probably win the election tew Congress withaout much trouble, for he has a strong following. But I wouldn't even bank too heavily on that, for plenty of voters are getting tired of Malley rule and machine politics, while others have got the habit of thinking as you dew, Virgil, that the Party can't lose, and that it doesn't make any difference whether they

vote or not. But the old steam roller isn't going tew be able tew keep on squashing the opposition flat, indefinitely. The most carefully built-up machine disintegrates in time, and, although a new one is usually constructed aout of the parts of the old, pretty quickly, the damage may have been done. That doesn't mean that I like machine rule. I'd rather see it busted — but not by the craowd that threatens tew dew it, up hyar. I'm even willing tew work with it, instead of against it, in a case like this, if the Party — the sit-tighters and the independent and progressive members of it will accept me as a candidate. The other day Clay advised me tew 'capitalize my present popularity.' It may not amaount tew much, in my case, but there are times when it's legitimate tew dew that, and I reckon that this is one of 'em, not in my own interests so much as in the interests of a Cause. At least that's haow I look at it. This is going tew be a fight for Law and Order, and we're going tew need all the help we can get. A good candidate from the machine's standpoint might not be able to catch the Independent votes, as I think there's a good chance that I might. I sent a letter off tew the leading newspapers yesterday, annaouncing my candidacy on these graounds, stated briefly; for the first blow, if it carries any punch at all, caounts heavily in politics as well as prize-fighting. Maybe the glad news will be taken as a joke, but perhaps it will cause an explosion. If it does I may be the one tew get buried under the débris."

"Oh, no, Abe! Why, you couldn't be — the newspapers and everybody will be for you. Think of the wonderful things that they've all been saying," cried Omie, and her brother added, "Sure. Everybody araound hyar knows what you stand for and what you've accomplished for the cause of Law and Order

in these maountains. Billy had the right dope when he called you its special champion, and of course the thinking, law-abiding people who form the majority aren't going tew repudiate what you've fought for and done, by throwing you daown, naow."

"Well, that remains tew be seen — naturally I hope not. However, it strikes me that you put the case a bit strong, Virge. I'm not the only man in the world, or even in this District, who stands for Loyalty to Law, and if the 'thinking people' don't choose tew think as we dew, that isn't going tew prove that they're wrong, necessarily. Just the same, I hope —'

"Mail!"

The barefooted, half-grown son of the postmistress at Smiling Pass stopped his whistling long enough to shout the word, as he swung in from the creek road, through the gate, and began to climb the path to the veranda steps. Arriving there, he tossed Virgil a good-sized bundle of letters and papers, and departed, still whistling.

Virgil ignored the correspondence for the moment and handed Abe the folded copy of the State's leading daily, saying, "Hyar you are. We'll let you be the

first tew see haow the news looks in print."

Abe laughed, but his big hand was not entirely steady as he tore off the wrappers and opened the paper. Omie's curiosity overcame her, and she leaned on his shoulder, her eyes eagerly seeking for momentous news. A big headline concerning the strike situation ran across the top of the front page, printed in heavily leaded type, but the left-hand column carried the story which they sought. It was headed, "Cong. Clayton a Candidate. Seeks Re-Election on Record." The third lead, in much smaller letters, read, "State's Atty. Blount Also Announces Candidacy."

Abe read it aloud, mechanically, and stopped. There was silence for an instant on the porch; then the girl burst into angry tears, and choked out, "Oh, the liar, I hate him. And I hate her, too," she added with apparent irrelevance.

"Steady, Omie," said the man, quietly. "Remember 'As fer Trouble you won't mind hit half so much if you jest smile.' Of course I'm plumb disappointed, although I've got tew admit that I was beginning tew have sort of a premonition of this. Well, it's all part of the game, I reckon, and maybe I took too much for granted, and was also what I swore that I wasn't going tew be, swelled-headed over my sudden rise tew something like fame. Let's see what aour leading daily

has tew say about it, and just where I get off.

"' Cumberland City, June 6. Hon. H. Clay Clayton, distinguished Member of Congress from the 12th District, to-day announced his decision tew again be a candidate for reëlection, as was generally expected. His nomination and election is regarded as a matter of course, for that district has never been represented in Washington by a stronger, saner and more popular man, one who has for three terms always fought valiantly for constructive and progressive legislation and the rights of his constituents. Simultaneous with this annaouncement came one to the effect State's Attorney Abraham Blount had also entered the field, seeking the nomination, his candidacy being based in part on the erroneous assumption that Clayton was not intending to run this year. Attorney Blount has earned the respect and appreciation of the entire State of Cumberland by reason of his sensational achievements as chief law officer for his Caounty. These have been notable and commendatory in the extreme, and indicate that such a man could ill be spared in the work which still

remains tew be done in that region during these troublesome times, and it is therefore certainly to be hoped that, now that Cong. Clayton has decided to run, Mr. Blount will withdraw and instead become a candidate for reëlection to the position which he is naow filling in such a splendid manner.'

"Soft soap," laughed Abe, tossing the paper aside, and clasping his huge hands about one knee. "I'd sure like to have the inside dope on that story. One thing's certain, dead certain. Clayton's sudden decision was the result of my annaouncement, and I'm willing tew bet a year's salary that he was either persuaded, or forced, intew running again, against his real desires. The question is, by whom and why? And this editor got his orders as tew the attitude of his paper, in a hurry, and I suppose that the same thing will hold true all along the line. But I'd sure like tew know the 'why' of it."

"I kin tell you, Abe Blount." Preacher Billy stood up, tall, spare and scowling. He lifted one bony arm, covered with a soiled cotton shirt, and shook his forefinger impressively. "The paowers uv Iniquity done hit! done hit bekaise they was afeered uv you. You're a danger tew them, whether they be daown in those stinkin' cesspools uv evil, the cities, or up hyar in the maountains. They dassent let you be elected tew a high office, fer fear that your reputation and paower will grow so great thet you'll finally be able tew drive them aout, as the Lord druv the money-changers from the temple." He swept his arm out with a commanding gesture. "Hit's the big jobs thet they're interested in. Thet's why they wants tew have you content yourself with a leetle one, and hit's fer thet they're tryin' tew make the people think you should stay hyar, by praisin' you tew the skies as State's Attorney."

"Maybe so, Billy, I don't know. But even that doesn't explain why they regard me as a danger. I've never tried tew mix up in their concerns, or even tew oppose the machine. Then why should they regard me as a possible menace? No, I guess that, after all, it's just a case of Clay's having changed his mind when the prospect of losing a soft job became too imminent."

"Perhaps hit's so; but I think different. Hit's the handwritin' on the wall they sees. Hit's corruption fearin' the incorruptible. They knows you're baound tew cross swords with them, sooner or later, fer you air the nateral enemy uv evil, wharever and in whatever form hit exists. I hain't imaginin' withaout cause, whatever. Thar's reason fer my sayin' what I done, but I air disputin' with myself if hit's right fer me tew tell the reason; I hev knowledge, but hit cum tew me in confidence. Thar's a sartin man in these hyar hills what's been moonshiner, bootlegger and aoutlaw; but, praise the Lord, he's seen the light and got hisself baptized with water and the Holy Spirit. He repented him uv his evil life, on his marrer bones, and some uv the things he told me you'd ought tew know, Abe; but I kain't jest make my mind clear abaout tellin' you what was told me, private."

"Don't dew it if you have any daoubts, Billy. I wouldn't have you break a confidence," said Abe,

quietly.

But Virgil was not satisfied to let it go at that.

"Why shouldn't he tell, if it concerns you?" he demanded. "He needn't tell the man's name, and Billy

is no Catholic priest —"

"I hain't a Papist, thet air a fact, and the man didn't ask me not tew tell. I will tell hit! Hit war this a-way. The man war one uv the chief moonshiners in this section, and one night he war daown tew a sartain taown,

aoutside the maountains, with a lot uv corn licker. Thar he met up with the man who bought the stuff from him and several others who war higher up in the councils of the ungodly craowd what secretly traffics in pizen, contrary to law. They fell tew drinkin', theirselves, and in time tew talkin' free, and boasting abaout the wonderful system what was makin' them all rich and keepin' them safe from prosecution, for thar air such a gang as you suspicioned, daown in the cities and taowns, what's leadin' aour maountin' men intew temptation and encouragin' 'em tew break the law, for gain, Abe.'

"Of course. I've known that, definitely, for a long time, Billy. And I came pretty nigh tew placing my finger on some of the ringleaders, a couple of months ago."

"But not quite. Why? Bekaise they keep their-selves too carefully hid aout uv sight. Hit's jest as Christ said, 'For every one thet deweth evil hateth the light, neither cometh tew the light lest his deeds be reproved.' But that night strong drink loosened the tongues uv the servants, and the secrets uv thar masters war disclosed. The man I'm a-tellin' you abaout, heerd and remembered, for he warn't as drunk as the others—he'd been pretty nigh weaned on moonshine!

"Well, after prohibition come thar sprung up many bootleggers in this hyar state, and they soon fell a-fighting among tharselves, like thieves. They cut prices; feuds and murder followed."

"Dog eat dog," interpolated the State's Attorney.

"Thet's hit! But hit warn't fer long. Sartain men with brains, paower and money j'ined in and stopped all thet. They organized the business uv selling pizonous licker like they had the business uv gittin' an' givin' political jobs and special laws favorin' the in-

terests uv a few. They always acted through others - thar's air the wisdom uv the sarpent - but thar names air known tew a few. Thar's big men, and middle men and leetle men in hit, each takin' tribute from the ones below. Thar's them as does the dirty work; thar's them thet supply the money tew buy the forbidden thing, not only from aour moonshiners but from Canady and furrin islands across the sea, and bring hit hyar by land, by water and through the air; thar's them thet furnish protection through political influence and even through the courts tharselves - fer the temples uv Justice hev become polluted by a few judges who owe thar high positions tew the men thet I'm a-speakin' uv. And thar's them thet sit in the seats uv the law-givers, thet voted fer the law and publicly swear tew uphold it, who wave the flag uv thar country as defenders uv hits Constitution, while they tharselves air drinkin' in straight defiance uv the law which they made, and daily takin' tribute from others thet break hit, mebbe not in coin, but in votes."

"I know all that, Billy. It's a shame and a disgrace. It's worse; it has created a situation of the gravest danger to the nation. Millions are absolutely honest in wanting prohibition, and in living up tew the law, but there are thousands of the worst sort of hypocrites, men who want the law continued for their own financial benefit, who are vociferously in favor of it because it enables them to fatten their bank accaounts. But are you dead certain that at least some of the men you've been telling us abaout are also mixed up with the political machine and opposing me because of my stand on the enforcement of the law?"

"I'm as sartain uv hit as I air thet thar's a Gawd above!" answered the preacher. "I hain't a-goin' tew tell you all the names he told me, but the chief uv them

all is the real political boss uv acur party, Malley; and one thet's workin' hand in hand with them — although he hain't so bad as some and the bootleggers laff at him fer a weaklin', a useful blind — air the Hon. H. Clay Clayton."

"Congressman Clayton!"

Three voices repeated the name in unison, with varying intonations.

"Hit's a fact! Maybe I kain't prove hit, but I

knows hit. Naow dew you see —?"

Abe abruptly arose and walked to the railing, where he stood a moment, immovable and with hands clenching it tightly. At last he turned towards them and they saw that his face was drawn, almost haggard looking.

"I'm sorry," he said quietly, and added, almost

under his breath, "especially for her."

The words, "I'm not," were on Omie's lips; but she checked their utterance in time and immediately experienced a feeling of shame at her thought.

"Are — are you going tew withdraw from the fight,

Abe? " asked Virgil, hesitatingly.

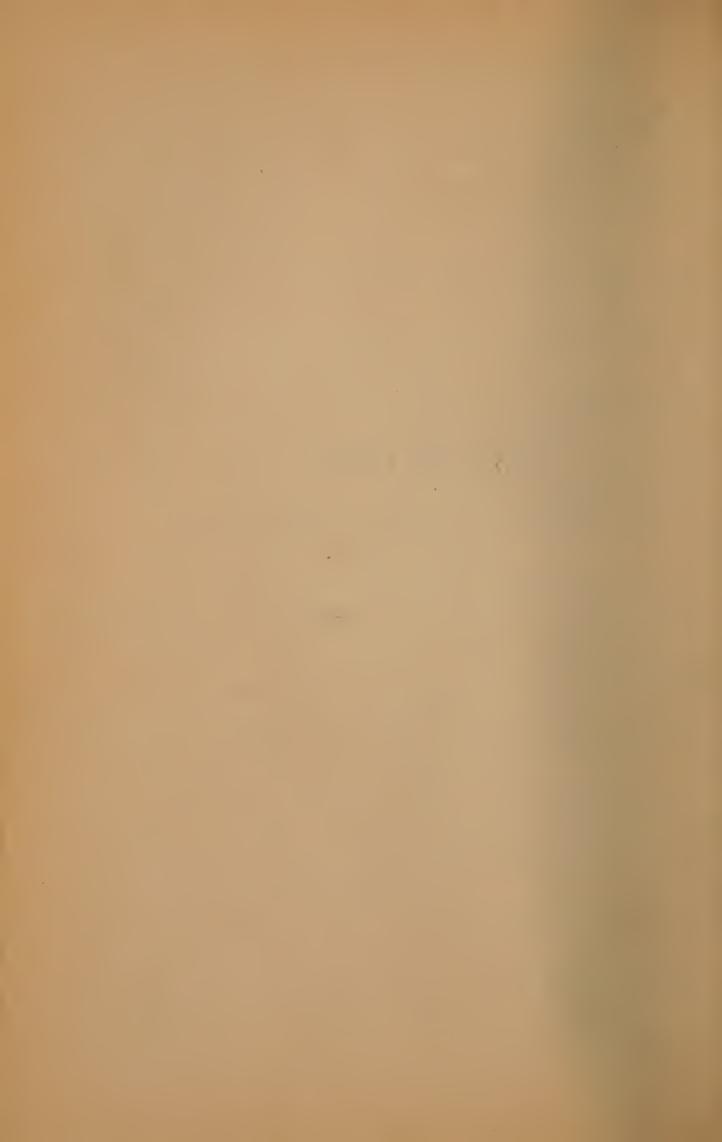
The other's hands clenched again and his countenance grew stern and dark, but when he answered it was in the same low, controlled voice.

"He's been my friend, and honestly friendly, I believe. But, no, I shan't quit, naow. It's going tew be a fight; a bitter one. And I'll probably get licked; but I'll make it, for what's at stake."

The mountain preacher stood up and gripped his hand hard.

"But you won't be beaten, Abe!" cried Omie; her voice unsteady with excitement and strong emotion. "You'll win; I know you will!"

THE CAMPAIGN—AND AFTERWARDS



CHAPTER I

COME, LET US REASON TOGETHER

"Well, that's that," remarked the State's Attorney.

"The die is cast, and I'm in this scrap tew stick tew the end — maybe the bitter end."

"No, no!" cried Omie, again.

"I'm right glad," the preacher said, simply. "I war aimin' tew fight agin them thar corrupt politicians, anyhaow; but hit's more inspirin' tew fight fer a person than jest agin one. Thet man Clayton mebbe hain't the worst uv the lot — mebbe the others jest use him fer thar own unrighteous ends — but he air a hypocrite like untew the Scribes and Pharisees. He prays alaoud thet Prohibition may be continued, standin' whar all men kin see him; but hit's a cloak. Naow you air an honest man and —"

"Hold on a minute, Billy. Don't be too hasty in setting me on a pedestal. I know haow strong you are

on the drink question —"

"Reckon you dew, my boy!" And who, indeed, did not in that shut-in section of hill country? The cause of Prohibition did not possess a more earnest or untiring fighter than this rude preacher, who, in the days of his youth, had heard and obeyed the call to religious consecration during a period of violent physical and spiritual revulsion following a drunken debauch.

"Yes. But we must not forget that the issue in this primary campaign isn't going tew be licker, but Law and Order. I can't even attack Clay's position on Prohibition unless I can get something a lot more definite than what you've told me. I believe it, in the light

of other things which I have seen; but it isn't competent evidence, it's merely hearsay, 'A says that B told him and C stated it as a fact.' No, I shall have tew leave that strictly alone."

"And the people kain't be let tew know what a

hypocrite —?"

"I'm afraid not, unless I can get hold of something definite tew pin the charge tew. I'll make the fight on my record, and the need of a candidate on which all the Party can unite tew meet the new danger; for I know that plenty of voters are disgusted with machine rule and either won't vote for its candidates or are ready tew revolt against them. I think that I can prove that Clay is one of Malley's tools, and too colorless tew unite aour ranks and lead them successfully in the battle that's coming in November — why, I don't believe that the man ever had a positive and original thought in his life. He's just a mirror."

"But thar's a great principle at stake, as well."

"I'm not forgetting that, Billy. But the principle isn't altogether, or even primarily, Prohibition. I'm going tew steer clear of it, if I can, and stick tew the real issue. But you have a right tew know just where I dew stand on it, before you tie up tew me. You said I was honest, and I want tew remain so."

"Sho! Everybody knows whar you-all stand on thet thar law."

"On the strict enforcement of it, yes. But I'm a candidate for election tew Congress, and some day Congress may be called upon tew vote on the question of its repeal, or at least on a change in the interpreting act which bears Mr. Volstead's name. The question is almost sure tew be asked 'where dew you stand on that proposition?'—although I personally think that it's a dead issue — for the present, at least."

"Why, Abe, you hain't a-goin' tew tell me that you hain't in favor uv the law?"

There was deep distress, bordering on consternation, in Billy's voice.

"That's the point. I'm not sure, myself, yet. As a matter of fact I'm pretty certain that the Eighteenth Amendment is going tew stay a part of the Constitution — that three-quarters of the States would never ratify a vote tew repeal it. Just the same, I don't think that it was a wise law, regarded in its broadest aspects. As I told Dago Lemos, a while back, I'm a lawyer and have the distressing habit of looking at all sides of a case. As I see this one, the issue isn't so much a question of the theoretical right and wrong of the drink problem as it is whether we've been pursuing the wrong road tew achieve the right result, and I think that we have."

Billy bristled.

"Ef you're a-goin' tew argue thet thar's more than one side tew the licker question, I air hyar tew show you thet a preacher kin hold up his side agin a politician — even as peert a one as you, Abe Blount."

"Pshaw, you're a politician yourself, Billy. And there are two sides tew every question intew which the factors of human liberties and human nature enter. Besides, this particular one has its roots planted deep

in the history of mankind, and -"

"The ax has been laid tew the root of the tree," broke in the preacher, fervently, if sententiously, and Abe answered, "Well, we may have cut the tree daown, but there seems tew be life enough left in the roots tew be sending up a bundle of almighty vigorous suckers, which are kept well watered, so tew speak, by men like aour friend Clayton. And I'd advise you not tew start quoting Scripture, for I can cap every one of

your 'Strong drink is raging' passages with a dozen contra. Want me tew try? I could make aout a pretty strong case in favor of wine, at least, from the Holy Script and the history of the Christian religion; but I'm not going tew dew it, for this is a matter in which religion isn't involved, except in so far as it is against the abuse of anything — things which in themselves may actually be beneficial if properly used, for example. And I don't want any of you tew get the idea that I'm not strong for temperance. I'm absolutely in favor of it, Billy, but temperance and the Volstead Act seem tew be horses of two mighty different colors. I'm sworn tew uphold the law —"

"And thar hain't no question but what you air up-holdin' hit, Abe. But I don't love fer tew hear you even talk agin hit."

"I'm not talking against it so much as abaout it; being a lawyer, I'm as likely tew argue on one side as the other until I'm dead sure in my own mind which the weight of the evidence is on. Everybody's talking prohibition, pro or con, naow-a-days, and we might as well have it aout. 'Come, let us reason tewgether,' as Mr. Isaiah said, and if there are any reporters present I'll ask them tew retire at this time," said Abe, by way of apostrophe, his deep eyes twinkling for the first time in many minutes. "I'm not ready tew be quoted as tew my attitude on the subject — yet. Besides, we may get intew it and discover that it's somewhat difficult tew find aour way araound, or aout again; in which case we'll be like the Country itself, and appear rather ridiculous. Did I ever tell you-all abaout the time I heard a furriner ask a little girl over on Rattlesnake where her paw was? No? 'He's up on top uv thet thar hill,' she replied, withaout going intew particulars as tew what he was dewing there - reckon you can guess. 'Can I get up there and back again before dark?' was the next question, and her answer was, 'Wall, I reckon you-all kin git *up* thar, a-fore dark, but I don't guess thet you're a-comin' back.'"

Even the preacher laughed a little, as he responded, "Well, ef we kain't find a clar trail big enough fer the two uv us tew walk abreast on, I'd shor love tew go over the graound with you and see ef I kain't convince you thet the way air clar. As I sees hit, hit's straight and narrer, like the one thet leads tew salvation. Don't you believe thet thar should be some law agin drunkenness, thet awful curse?"

"I sure dew. The question, though, seems tew me tew be 'What's the best kind, taken all in all,—moral law, or one printed in the statute books—prohibition, or inhibition?'" He broke off suddenly, turned towards Omie and said, "I wonder whether that famous six thousand volume library of yours happens tew contain a copy of a novel called, 'The Honorable Peter Sterling'?"

"Oh, dew you want it, if I can find one? I'll run and see; but you've got tew promise not tew talk any more 'til I get back. I don't want tew miss anything," admonished the girl, who had been a deeply interested listener, torn between loyalty to the teachings of her "Smiles" and her trust in Abe, who suddenly seemed to be opposed to them.

Camille took the occasion to depart and assist her mother-in-law in the kitchen, for the discussion was just a little beyond her, and Omie flew down the steps and towards the little library building.

By way of explanation of his queer request, Abe said to the others, "If you're interested in American politics it would be a good idea for you tew get a historical backgraound against which tew set present day

conditions, and you can't dew it better than by reading some novels like the one I've just asked Omie tew see if she can find. And there's the story of Uncle Jethro Bass in a book called 'Coniston,' written by a man up North named Winston Churchill, and some others of his, the titles of which I can give you. They're not only darned good yarns; but I reckon that they picture certain epochs in America's political history pretty accurately. You can get a fair idea of the subject withaout having tew wade through a lot of dry-as-dust text books — that's one of the best things abaout the really worthwhile novels; the authors of them dew all the 'wading' for you, and then give you some valuable information along with entertainment; they make the men and issues of other days and other places alive and grippingly interesting. I like 'em, although personally I think that the most interesting and helpful book is always the real biography of some great —"

"The most interestin' and helpful book, son, is the Holy Bible," interpolated the preacher solemnly and

ready to contend his point.

"Pretty much biographical, ain't it, Billy?" remarked Abe, and the other subsided. "I want 'The Honorable Peter' because, if my recollection is correct, I can spot a place in it where the writer discusses the problem which we're talking abaout, naow, and says some things which struck me, when I read it a year or so ago, as containing some mighty good sense. It was written all of thirty years ago, but it applies today — wait until I read it and see if you don't agree. Besides, it sort of blazes the trail which I think I'm likely tew follow."

There was another moment of desultory talk, during which Abe lit his corncob pipe and Preacher Billy slipped a morsel of mountain twist under his tongue.

Then Omie appeared on the run and rejoined them, with her breath coming fast and her cheeks richly toned with the rosy glow of youth, heightened by exercise. In her hand she carried the book for which Abe had asked.

"Gosh, you back already?" demanded the man. "That speaks equally well of your system of cataloguing and the speed in those pretty legs of yours there, I reckon I shouldn't have said that, but I can't help being honest, you know."

He took the volume and the girl perched herself, smiling, on the veranda railing, for the moment all child again and without a suggestion of embarrassment.

Abe turned towards the back of the book and, after a search of brief duration, announced, "Hyar it is. Naow you-all listen tew this. Peter Sterling has become the political boss of New York City, and he's discussing the drink problem with some of his highbrow society acquaintances; he never uses liquor himself, but he's defending his friendship with saloonkeepers and drunkards. Says he:

- "'I wish tew see the day come when such gross forms of physical enjoyment as tippling shall cease entirely [I reckon that we're both with him in that, Billy | but till that day comes and humanity has taught itself and raised itself, I want tew see fair play.'
- "And so dew I," interpolated the reader, glancing up.
- "' There is as much champagne drunkenness as whiskey drunkenness, in proportion. But the man who drinks champagne is sent home in a cab and put tew bed, while the man who can't afford that kind of drink, and is made mad by poisoned and doctored whiskey, doctored and poisoned because of aour heavy tax on it, is arrested.'

"Just change the wording a bit, and see haow that applies, to-day. Make 'champagne' read 'high-priced booze — real stuff — that's smuggled intew the United States or taken aout of bonded warehaouses on illicit or forged permits,' and change 'doctored and poisoned whiskey' tew 'bootlegged hootch, full of fusel oil or made aout of wood alcohol' and then hear this!

"'That's the shameful thing abaout aour so-called temperance legislation [or so called Prohibition law]. It is based on an unfair interference with personal liberty, and always discriminates in favor of the man with money."

"But it shouldn't," Billy protested.

"Of course it shouldn't; but it does. We're talking abaout the law as it is, and that includes the way it is working out actually. At least, I am. There's a practical question as well as a theory involved, and we can't dodge it. But I'll come back tew that. Peter goes on tew say, 'If the rich man has his club, let the poor man have his saloon.' Of course he isn't favoring either, but annaouncing a principle which is absolutely saound. And we mustn't lose sight of the fact that the saloons were going aout of existence, mighty fast, and that drinking among the rich was also growing less before the Eighteenth Amendment made it fashionable again. But hyar's what I especially wanted tew read tew you, and where I'm with the writer withaout qualification:

"One of the women says, 'But haow much better, though, tew stop the sale of wine everywhere,' and Peter answers, 'That is neither possible nor right. You can't strengthen humanity by tying its hands. It must be left free tew become strong. I have thought much abaout the problem, and I see only one fair and practical means of bettering aour condition. But, boss as the papers say I am, I'm

not strong enough tew force it.' 'What is that, Peter?' asked Dorothy. 'So long as a man drinks in such a way as not tew interfere with another person's liberty, we have no right tew check him. But the moment he does, the public has a right tew protect itself, and his family, by restraining him as it does thieves, murderers, or wife-beaters. My idea -'

"Well, he goes on tew propose a system of revocable licenses tew be granted tew men who want tew drink. It's mighty interesting, but it would be starting us off on another track. The thought I was after is the one abaout not being able tew strengthen humanity by tying its hands."

"That is, it's another problem where education offers the only final and lasting solution," suggested Virgil.

"That's just my point, Virge. It is the only complete solution. Of course it would take - or have taken — time. Changing over human nature is a mighty slow job, but the mills of the gods always grind slow, and -"

"Naow I'm a-goin' tew convict you aout of your own maouth, Abe," cried Billy, eagerly. "Virgil told me thet when you war up hyar, a year ago, and a-tellin' 'em abaout the danger from the anarchists among the coal miners, you said thet the law should be invoked tew keep us maountaineers aout uv mischief until the time come when we could all be educated tew understand haow evil war the thing they're a-preachin'. Hain't thet what the prohibition law aims tew dew?"

"Probably. But I was speaking then of one of the fundamental laws, on which the safety of the government and even civilization rests, while this is an artificial one, which thousands - perhaps millions - of people honestly regard as contrary tew the inalienable

rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. It was passed by the votes of equally honest, and perhaps higher-minded millions; but most of them didn't foresee the practical difficulties which might follow in forcing it daown the throats of the unwilling; it was an idealistic measure, carried through on a great wave of national idealism when we were all spiritually exalted by the war and forgetful that the normal man in normal times is a pretty weak and perverse animal — but jealous of his liberty.

"A law isn't in itself necessarily a sacred thing; but it must either be enforced or changed; disregard of any law is darned bad business. But, although my business is enforcing laws — and I hope that it's going tew be framing 'em — I believe that there are altogether too many on the books, naow. A few fundamental ones, fully lived up tew, or fully enforced, if necessary, would be a whole lot better than twice or ten times as many only half observed."

"Sure, but —"

"Hold on a jiffy, Billy, and let me get this aout of my system. The United States grew great by sticking tew the Ten Commandments and the Constitution of Washington and Madison—a document which furnished a pretty nearly perfect faoundation on which tew build a republican form of government. They didn't foresee every contingency which was tew arise, of course, and the earlier amendments tew it were necessary. But these were all fundamental, too, and strengthened it, whereas, if we keep on adding other amendments, which won't, or don't, work, we're not only going tew make the whole structure top-heavy, but fill it with weak spots. I once knew a chemistry teacher who asked his class what they could put in a container tew make it lighter, expecting the answer tew be 'any

lighter-than-air gas.' But they shaouted, all together, 'Holes!' The Constitution is an entity. Put a hole in any part of it and it is made lighter and weakened. You can't hope properly tew enforce any law that a considerable proportion of the people are dissatisfied with — Lincoln recognized that fact when he said something tew this effect, 'Public sentiment is everything in any community. With it, nothing can fail; withaout it, nothing can succeed. Consequently, one who molds public sentiment '- educates the people - 'goes deeper than he who enacts laws. He makes the laws possible or impossible to be executed.'

"Those may not be the exact words, but it's the idea. And failure tew enforce any law weakens the whole fabric of the law. We're talking abaout the Eighteenth Amendment; but what is happening, naow, in relation tew it, has happened for years with the Fifteenth, and shows haow a law is subservient tew public sentiment. Remember what that one provides, Omie?"

The girl shook her head and Virgil spoke up, "Let's see. Isn't that the one which prescribes that the right tew vote shan't be denied any one on accaount of race, color or previous condition of servitude?"

"Go tew the head of the class! Of course it was aimed particularly against parts of the South with a large negro population, which had been denied the suffrage after the Civil War. Did it, does it work? Let me tell you a true story abaout just haow it does work in at least one State. The white people pretend tew agree tew the proviso, and allaow any one tew vote who can satisfy the Registrar that he can read and understand a portion of the Constitution. That saounds fair enough, but — Well, up comes Mr. Whiteman and wants tew register. Official states the regulation and the applicant says, 'I reckon that lets

me aout, brother. My paw joined the Confederate army when I war a leetle shaver, and I didn't get tew go tew school much.' 'Oh, I don't know,' answers the Registrar. 'Let's see if you can't read this! 'and he points tew the passage which runs, 'He'-meaning the President — 'shall hold office during a term of four years.' Mr. Whiteman painfully spells the words aout, and when the official asks him what it means, answers, 'Why, I reckon it means abaout what it says.' His name promptly goes on the list. Then up comes Mr. Blackman, who is told the same requirements. 'That's all right with me, boss, I taught grade school for three or four years,' says he. The Registrar indicates this section, 'No bill of attainder or ex post facto law shall be passed.' Applicant reads it and the official says, 'Naow, what does it mean?' Mr. Blackman scratches his woolly poll and replies, 'Reckon it means that this hyar nigger ain't a-gwine tew vote."

Of course they all laughed and voiced their indignation, as well.

Then Abe continued, "The story is kind of funny, although the fact isn't. But it illustrates what happens tew a law that the people don't want. And there are plenty of other ways of getting araound it, too."

"But they did want the Eighteenth Amendment," persisted Billy.

"Or thought they did. Sometimes a child wants a knife tew play with, especially if it's new and shiny; but, if it's so sharp that it cuts his finger, he isn't so keen for it afterwards. The law might have done all the good that was predicted for it and not cut so deeply intew the sensitive quick of the body politic if the Volstead Act hadn't given it such an almighty sharp edge. Millions were used tew drinking beer and light wines, occasionally or regularly, and it struck them as utterly

unreasonable for the government tew deny them what they considered a harmless pleasure, and even an actual benefit — remember what Paul wrote Timothy, 'Use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities '?

"Apparently a nation reacts a lot like an individual. If it's been used tew alcoholic stimulants and they're cut off, suddenly and completely, the system rebels and raises ructions. Personally, I believe that the one-half of one percent interpretation of what is intoxicating liquor is bad law and bad business. And I think that I'd vote tew modify that Act, if I ever got a chance. Oh, I know that a howl would go up everywhere tew the effect that it would be giving booze a legalized foothold again, but I don't believe it. It wouldn't, if the more liberal law were strictly enforced, and it would be much easier than it is tew enforce the present one, because a very considerable part of those who are bitterly dissatisfied, naow, would be satisfied. And those who want gin and whiskey are apparently going tew get it, anyway. There's another reason for a change, an economic one. Taxes on wines and beers would bring in a great many million dollars a year, and the Lord knows that the country needs them tew help pay its debts and provide for its wounded soldiers. That isn't an argument in favor of taking tribute from evil-dewing, Billy, for I don't think that beer and wine with a reasonably limited percent of alcohol are evil - you can't reconcile the proposition that they are with either medical testimony or the Christian religion.

"But tew get back tew the Eighteenth Amendment itself. Up tew the time of its passage this country had been steadily progressing towards real temperance and a sane attitude on the drink question. Its condition was probably the healthiest in the history of mankind

since it was discovered that fruit juices could be fermented intew a drink with a kick and 'make glad the heart of man.' Drunkenness was being generally frowned upon; strong licker was going aout of style, socially, and saloons were being legislated aout of existence locally, all over the country. But the rabid reformers weren't satisfied with that. The processes of education were too slow; they wanted tew see Rome built in a day. It was fine in theory, maybe, but it can't be done. If the faoundations of a structure are too hastily built, the whole thing is likely tew crash daown. Tew change the simile, too great speed often causes a man tew stumble, and short cuts tew a goal, which may look easy at the start, are often later faound tew be filled with rocks, mudholes, brambles and other impedimenta.

"I'm interested in molding public sentiment through full understanding, even if that necessitates the taking of what might look like a step or two backwards. We all of us have tew go back a ways, occasionally, in order tew find a better path than the one we've started aout on. I know that there's something mighty fine and inspiring abaout plowing ahead, through and over obstacles, but that may become a stubborn waste of time and energy, and even foolhardiness filled with danger."

"But a principle..." began Billy, and Abe broke in with, "I wouldn't compromise where a principle is at stake. But the principle in this case is the abolition of the drink evil and not the Volstead Act—that's merely one way to the end and it's proving tew be a pretty rough way, which would indicate that there's at least a chance that it's the wrong way. When the police force of a country and perhaps the army and navy have tew be called aout tew enforce a law, it is evi-

dence that there is something radically wrong either with the law or the people whom it affects, and the chances are that both are, in part, at fault, as is usually the case when quarrels arise. And, as a matter of expediency, if not a matter of justice, each should yield something.

"Well, naow you know where I stand, and I hope that I haven't hurt your feelings, Billy, for I want you with me, body and soul, in this fight. We could go on discussing prohibition and making platitudes abaout it, until the caows come home — and go a-field again tomorrow morning — but what's the use? "

"Thar hain't no use. I want tew think over what you've said before I make up my mind abaout hit. You may be right on the question uv wine; Christ used hit, Hisself, and give hit tew His Disciples. But I've been thinkin' uv prohibition and moonshine, mostly. Weuns don't hev much tew dew with beer and wine, up hyar in the maountings."

"I'll say we don't, and my statement that I'd probably vote for a modification of the Volstead Act, if I'm elected tew Congress and got a chance tew dew it, isn't likely tew get me many votes in a District that's principally interested in making and drinking 'corn' whiskey, or making and selling it at a big profit as the result of a law that's so strict it encourages bootlegging. Especially when I'm running in a 'Dry' State, and against an office-holder who pleases the drys by aoutwardly shaouting for Prohibition on every possible occasion, and is known by the bootlegging, tippling fraternity tew be inwardly wet."

"Which air a fact. Hit'll hurt you bad, I reckon; hurt you with them thet's been praisin' you for enforcin' the law so strict as well as with them thet's profitin' by breakin' the law, as hit is. But I know

you'll tell the truth and take your chances, fer you air honest, Abe Blount. I loves you fer hit, and you kin caount on me tew be with you."

"Bully for you, Billy, I'm glad tew hear it." Abe clasped the preacher's hand warmly.

"And naow let's forget both prohibition and politics for a while. I need a few haours' rest and recreation pretty bad — and I may need a haouse and lot tew retire tew, come next November. Where are those plans, Omie?"

CHAPTER II

THE POT BUBBLES

During the next four hours Abe Blount gave a remarkable demonstration of his ability to concentrate on one thing at a time. His decision made and his platform roughly shaped and builded for the inspection of his intimate friends at Smiling Pass, he dismissed politics from his mind altogether, relaxed and drank deep with unalloyed enjoyment of friendship's cup.

While the women were washing the dinner dishes, he strolled with Virgil down to Judd Amos' diminutive general store, where they found half a dozen mountaineers already congregated for their evening get-to-

gether.

Perching himself on the high counter, he reached back for a home-made fiddle which lay on the shelf behind it, thrust it unconventionally against his side, and surprised them all by playing a lively jig, keeping time to his tune by slapping the sole of his broad boot on the tobacco-stained floor. When the applause had ended, one of the number joshed him on the extreme length of limb which had enabled him to do it, and he replied with a drawl, "Know haow long a man's legs should be, Lige? Well, hit's secret, but I'll let you-all in on hit, ef you'll promise not tew tell. Jest long enough tew reach from his waist tew the floor."

This started him off on a string of humorous stories and when he finally took his departure he had six votes as good as in his pocket, without having spoken a word

of a political nature.

Then Omie proceeded to claim him, and, while the

rest of the household busied themselves with the final odds and ends of the common daily tasks, the girl and man sat on the veranda railing in the flooding moonlight and sang in unison the "long and lonesome" songs of their people, the mountaineers' ballads. Omie was very happy, and her happiness added something to her sweet, full tones which caused them to strike deeper into Abe's heart than had the finely cultivated voice of Marion Clayton. For her part, the girl decided that, although his notes lacked something in musical quality, they sounded true and manly, like himself.

Their impromptu concert ended in a burst of mutual merriment as they finished the sung-and-spoken dialogue concerning the "Good Old Man," a long, drawn-out series of questions and answers during the course of which he informed her that he had been to town to buy her a dress pattern which cost two dollars - and didn't care if it broke him; that now he craved nourishment, to wit, two bushels of fried eggs - and didn't care if they killed him; and, when she asked where he wanted "tew be buried at" he announced a preference for the chimney corner. "'Hain't you feered folks'll laff at you, my good old man? Hain't you feered folks'll laff at you, my honey leetle dove? Hain't you feered folks'll laff at you, my good old man? You're the best old man in the world!" " caroled Omie in conclusion, and Abe solemnly rejoined, "'Don keer ef they dew '- and I don't."

The song had a prophetic note in it, for, during the two months which were to follow, he had plenty of opportunity not to care when folks laughed. The newspapers, with one insignificant exception, were merely mouthpieces for the machine, and refused to take seriously the candidacy, at least at the outset. When they mentioned the contest for the Congressional nomination in the 12th District of Cumberland it was unequivocally to urge the renomination and reëlection of the Hon. H. Clay Clayton, and to give little or no space to his opponent.

This was far more discouraging to Abe than bitter hostility would have been, publicity being the breath of the politician's life in this age of the world. Abuse is far preferable to being ignored, for, if it is carried to an extreme, an American public reacts and often expresses its sympathy with the under dog in the form of votes for him.

The little that did appear in print concerning his campaign was, by design, given a humorous twist. Scarcely a story failed to make reference to the State's Attorney as "Our David," the self-appointed defender of Law and Order, the People's champion; and in time, as his attitude on the subject of Prohibition became known, the opportunity to class him as an unpleasantly moist "Dry," was seldom passed up.

Occasionally, too, cartoons appeared, Abe's ungainly form and long features lending themselves ideally to the humorist in black and white. The candidate himself got many a hearty laugh out of them, but they filled Omie with bitter rage, which eventually vented itself in hot tears, shed in the privacy of her bedroom.

The single exception noted was the four page, weekly sheet — the only newspaper published in the County — printed at Smiling Pass, which was of course red hot for him; but this had a negligible circulation.

Yet, despite these handicaps, and the fact that he continued to perform the manifold duties of his office, all day and every day, his campaign made progress. The first week in July ushered in a prolonged torrid spell; but the weather was not as hot as the fight became, in time. Before its ending it was to become

known as the bitterest primary campaign ever waged within the borders of the State.

Many men and many women, especially the latter, knew, or felt, that Abe was honest, and they had already fallen under the spell of his picturesque personality and reputation for sensational accomplishments. This fact drew audiences — not large in themselves, but comparatively so — wherever he was announced to speak, evenings, and wherever he spoke he made votes by his quiet, determined manner, his unoratorical, but strongly framed sentences, the obvious sincerity of his message. Besides, his auditors were human and they were attracted by the outstanding human qualities of the man and tickled by the droll, appropriate stories with which he salted and peppered the meat of his remarks.

Realizing that Culverton City and the larger towns would naturally go against him, anyway, he bent his energies at first to the hill country and foothill villages, and, although the numbers which he could reach on any one occasion were necessarily small, they began to mount up in the aggregate, and reports of the effectiveness of his campaigning soon reached the ears of the gods in the machine, and caused a growing uneasiness among them. Straightway the political pot began first to simmer, then to bubble.

Abe rejoiced when the first countering blow came, for evidence of sufficient concern on the part of his opponents to make them take active measures to defeat him was an indication that others felt that his own position had become stronger, possibly even a menace. Theretofore Congressman Clayton had chosen to ignore the fact that he had a contest on his hands, and contented himself with making the popular type of large-sounding patriotic speeches to men, flattering

women, kissing babies and shaking hands in the good old fashioned Southern way. But, with the second month of the campaign under way, and the first week in August drawing rapidly nearer with its primary election, he began to pay his respects to his opponent more and more frequently. To Abe's amused chagrin they were respects, and he came to the conclusion that either Clayton was a more astute politician than he had given him credit for being, or, more likely, studiously playing a rôle written for him by Malley.

The Congressman expressed the highest personal regard for his opponent, commended his ability, but regretted that one who had proved himself so splendid and efficient a State's Attorney should not have been content to continue and carry on in the position where one of his character and efficiency was so greatly needed in those troublesome times - especially so, if there were any real rather than fancied basis for his dire prophecies concerning the future activities of the forces of unrest in the hill country. The step which

he had taken was assuredly ill-advised!

Abe grinned with somewhat bitter amusement as he read a report of his speech, recalling what Clayton had himself said at Smiling Pass, the previous spring. Clayton's was a charitable, broad-minded — and votemaking — attitude and it struck just the right keynote for his campaign which, he announced, would be pursued by him on an uncompromisingly high plane from which he would not descend into personalities. He stood aquarely on his record in the office, reëlection to which he sought.

But, if Clayton's campaign conduct was above reproach and free from bitterness, as much could not be said for that of speakers in his behalf, who now began to appear in considerable numbers. They seized upon it as the basis for odious comparisons. According to these vehement gentlemen, who possessed the Southern brand of political oratory in full measure, their candidate was a sterling statesman with a notable record in National affairs, who fully merited the customary recognition and regard; whereas his opponent was a clever but uncouth mountaineer, the victim of an inflated sense of his own importance, who was seeking to advance himself politically at the expense of one who had been his friend and to whom he owed his present position. Worse than that, he was, open-eyed, striving to create dissension and schism in the ranks of the Party at a time when a solid front against the Democrats was particularly needed. He was a traitor, a Benedict Arnold, no less!

Reports of these various speeches received from the press far greater space than was usual where only one District was involved, which seemed to indicate that those who dictated the policy of the Republican papers felt that something more than one seat in Congress was at stake. The Democratic sheets naturally rejoiced, but, oddly enough, also favored Clayton for the nomination, a fact which encouraged Abe not a little, even though he vaguely felt that it was probably the result of a working agreement between the powers which ruled both Parties to unite in opposition to any one who might prove a menace to machine-governed politics.

The mountain candidate seized upon the opening made by these first undisguised attacks to reply in kind, selecting for the occasion a rally which had been arranged for him in one of the more important towns. There, in his most telling speech to date, he joined issue with his critics. He pointed out the fact that the favor shown for his opponent by the Democratic press was an indication that they regarded Congressman Clayton

as the one whom they stood a better chance of defeating at the election, and then swung into a stinging attack on party bossism and its complaisant candidate, during the course of which he reiterated the reasons which had impelled him to enter the field, much as he had set them forth in answering Preacher Billy's question.

This was News, and the papers printed a fairly comprehensive resumé of his speech. Marion Clayton read it, and, under the sweep of anger at the attack on her father, sat down and wrote Abe a bitter, impetuous note, charging him with base ingratitude and declaring that her former warm friendship for him had turned into contempt and dislike. The letter hurt, for Abe had formed a sincere liking for the girl, who typified all the external charms and graces which he lacked, and had enjoyed his brief, intimate companionship with her more than he had thought possible. He sighed a little as he tore the note into tiny bits and slowly dropped them into the waste-basket. Then he deliberately turned his back upon them and memories alike, and sought to concentrate on his work. For once he found it impossible. The thought of the friendships which he was sacrificing, and the enemies he was making, by his obedience to the call of duty, as he heard it, persisted in running counter to the consideration of the legal question on which he was engaged, and he finally closed his books with a gesture of unwonted irritation, clapped his broad-brimmed felt hat on the back of his head and strode out of the office. The noontide was oppressively hot and sultry and Abe's desires turned naturally to the higher hills and then to Smiling Pass. He might have lost certain former friends, irretrievably, but there were others to whom the contest was drawing him closer and closer with ever-strengthening bonds. He needed them, now; their friendship, consolation and encouragement — although he disliked to admit even to himself that he required the latter two.

Making his decision on the spur of the moment, he informed his assistant that he would not return until the following morning, procured and saddled his horse—a good mount was as much a necessity as a luxury in that region—and took the rough, twelve-mile trail into the heart of the hills. The exercise and solitude laid healing, strengthening hands upon his overworked brain, and, by the time that the Community Center was reached, he was restored to his normal condition of mind—quieted, and ready to face whatever else of evil the future might hold, with philosophical courage and optimism.

Suddenly he cried "Whoa!" and reined in his horse abruptly. He had just turned the spur of the mountain, and directly before him, a few rods up the hillside on a knoll, stood a new, and nearly completed cottagehouse, its matched boards of yellow pine, shingled roof and window panes shining in the afternoon sunlight. The hillside forest, in full foliage, supplied a green, tapestried background for it, a towering sycamore stood just to one side, with the waters of a laughing brooklet playing hide and seek about its far-flung roots. A sudden mist rose before the man's eyes. Here was "home," his home, the visible product of his friends' planning and labor — Omie's, Virgil's, Billy's, and the boys at Smiling Pass. In the rush of his official duties and campaigning he had almost forgotten that it had been even planned, and now it was nearly done! Abe started to ride up to its open doorway and then changed his mind and continued on. He had an intuitive feeling that Omie would want to be the first to show it to him, and he would not deny her that privilege.

Abe's arrival at the Center was the occasion for a noisy welcome, as the summer session was in full swing, and, in the meeting of warm friends among the staff and the students, and three new and eagerly enthusiastic workers, fresh from colleges in the North, his mind found just the needed distraction. But he was not fully at ease and contented until there came an hour just before supper when he could be joined by his four closest friends for an intimate talk in the little office. As was inevitable, it almost immediately took on a political tinge, for not only did they want to hear how things were going, from him, but Virgil and Preacher Billy had much to tell of their own activities in the hills. It also shortly appeared that Omie had turned active campaigner, too, and she showed herself as well versed as Abe, himself, in what the newspapers had printed concerning the fight. Her youthful enthusiasm for his cause, and bitter hostility toward Clayton and all his works, were alike so vehement that it secretly amused, while it pleased, him. She joined with her brother and the preacher in assuring him that they would "deliver" that particular part of the mountains for him, almost to a man — and woman, for that matter.

The candidate next told them of the progress of the campaign in its broader aspect, as it appeared to him, and concluded by saying, "One thing's doggone sure — I may not have got 'em on the run, but I've made 'em sit up and take notice. The machine has begun tew bring some of its heaviest guns intew action, and is using plenty of ammunition — which is inspiring, in a way. And it's also started tew use poisoned gas, which is decidedly otherwise."

"'Poisoned gas'?" echoed Omie, in a puzzled voice.

"That's what I call it. You know what a poison pen letter is. Well, this is its verbal counterpart. I'm getting reports from all quarters that they've started a whispering campaign that is plumb devilish. It makes me see red."

Billy bluntly demanded just what he meant, and Abe replied, "Oh, nasty insinuations regarding my moral character and — and parentage."

Virgil shot a hasty glance at his sister, whose face

burned an angry red and then turned white.

"Omie understands," added Abe, quietly.

"Yes, I dew know the whole story, Virge, and I think for them tew bring it in is simply *despicable*," cried the girl, struggling to keep back her tears. "Oh, can't something be done tew stop it?"

"No. There's nothing tew dew but ignore it. It hurts, just the same, hurts personally and politically."

"And that hypocrite laoudly boasted that he wouldn't think of descending tew personalities!"

"He hasn't, personally. I can't pin the rumor on him, and politics isn't like law, where a man can sometimes be held responsible for the acts of his authorized agents. Indeed, he may have no knowledge of it, so I wouldn't call him a hypocrite, Omie," answered the man, mildly.

"But I will, for he is one, and we've got tew beat him — we've just got tew. He's a hypocrite and a cheat." She sprang excitedly to her feet and, running to the desk, took from a drawer a long newspaper clipping which she thrust into Abe's hand, crying, "Did you read this story of the wonderful speech he made on the Fourth of July?"

Abe glanced at it and nodded, with an, "Uh-huh. I thought that it was mighty good, although he reached quite an altitude and plucked too many posies from

the heights of Parnassus. Honestly, I didn't think Clay had it in him."

"You're right. Honestly, he didn't. He stole those words from the immortal dead, Abe."

" No! "

"Yes, he did — from Stephen Douglas. I almost believe that God meant for me tew find it out, it happened so queerly. The very day that I read this speech in the paper I was cataloguing some new books that had been sent in. One was 'Masterpieces of American Oratory,' and just by chance I opened it abaout the middle and glanced over a page. It struck me as awfully familiar, and all at once I remembered where I had seen practically the same words before, so I ran and got the newspaper, and there was the very speech, almost word for word, quoted from Congressman Clayton, if you please."

Abe whistled softly; then he chuckled, and, laying

his head back against the chair, laughed heartily.

Omie stamped her foot.

"Haow can you laugh at it, Abe Blount, when that man is getting applause and praise for dewing something utterly dishonest? I think he ought tew have his tongue torn aout."

The man laughed louder than ever at her flaming

vehemence.

"My, but you're a hard-hearted woman, Omie. I'd rather have you with me than 'agin' me! Reckon you haven't learned that the motto of the modern world is 'It's all right so long's you don't get caught.' Clay committed the crime of getting faound out by you, and —"

"And he's going tew be faound aout by everybody, if I have anything tew say abaout it," retorted the

girl.

Abe became abruptly serious.

"Well, I don't know. We mustn't act too hastily in a matter of this kind. If he actually did plagiarize — swipe that speech, deliberately — it was pretty picayune business, tew put it mildly; but I'm inclined tew think that we'd be chargeable with playing small potato politics aourselves if we should attack him on that graound. Besides, we don't know all the circumstances. A newspaper report seldom tells the whole story. Maybe he prefaced his remarks by saying, 'As another great man once remarked,' and the reporter left that aout." Abe's deep-set gray eyes were twinkling again. "Or perhaps he kept two fingers held up on either side of his mouth, as quotation marks, while he was speaking."

"Oh, you're hopeless!" flashed Omie, and hastily turned her back, biting her lip to check its trembling.

She had cherished her great discovery as a personal contribution which she would make to aid the State's Attorney in winning his fight, and now he not only refused to accept it, but seemed to treat it as a joke. The girl was deeply hurt, but she concealed the fact so well that Abe did not guess it and so lost the chance speedily to heal the wound with a word of appreciation. If he had not been so absorbed in his own thoughts, which were serious enough under his cloak of temporary levity, he might have saved her an hour of bitter unhappiness, which was none the less tragic for being rather childlike.

"I believe that Omie's right," broke in Virgil. "You'd see the funny side of life even if you were dying, Abe Blount." And Abe responded, "Well, I hope so. Thank heaven there is a funny side, when so much of it is deadly serious. It keeps mankind from going mad altogether, and we're bad enough as it is. I've dis-

covered that even a red-hot political campaign has its humorous incidents. Did you happen tew see this clipping? " He took from his pocketbook a brief item which ran, "Among the signatures on Attorney Blount's nomination papers, filed yesterday, was that of 'Henry Clay Clayton.' No, it was Not that of the Congressman. As the schoolboy stated in an essay, 'Some folks say that Homer's works were not written by Homer but by another man of the same name.'"

Virgil read it aloud, grinned and handed it back with an amused comment, but Omie did not join in the laughter. Her back still turned to them, she stood at the open window with her hand pressed close to the bosom of her thin muslin dress, too unhappy and filled

with self-pity to see any humor in it.

"Let me tell you abaout an incident that happened daown tew Bear's Maouth Creek a week ago," said Abe, sliding farther down in his chair until he was halfseated, half-reclining on it, with his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his riding breeches. "I went tew address a meeting held in the old school-haouse there, and Johnnathan's Johnnathan introduced me - or tried tew. That's a notorious moonshine section, you know -I had occasion tew visit it more than once, for a different purpose, when I was Sheriff - and our presiding officer had 'looked upon the corn when it was white' somewhat too often during the preliminaries. Well, he advanced, waveringly, to the edge of the platform, steadied himself by clinging tew the preacher's table, waved his free hand gracefully on high and spoke something like this." Abe's voice changed to a halfmaudlin tone and his face assumed a look of drunken vacuity. "'Friends an' fellow-shizens. We air . . . hup . . . ashembled thish evenin' . . . hup . . . tew welcome . . . dishtinguish' fellow-shizen, aour nex'

... nex'... whasha goin' tew be, Abe? Tha's ri'. Aour nex' Congreshman in ... hup... Congresh. He's... he's... he... Oh, h—l, you talk tew 'em, Abe. They're your constishuents.'"

This time even Omie's slender shoulders shook a lit-

tle as the rest laughed.

"Then," continued the story-teller, "night before last, when I invaded my first real taown and spoke tew an audience of several hundred, there was a little deaf old lady in the very front row, and, when I went up on the platform, she turned tew her companion and said, in what was meant tew be a whisper but which was audible half over the hall, 'My, he's even homelier than his picture be. But thar, he looks real honest, I'll say thet fer him.' Dew you hear that, Omie?"

"Yes."

The man was a little surprised by the curtness in her voice and asked, "Why, Omie, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. Only . . . Well, I don't believe that you care abaout winning half as much as I dew. You

just keep on telling funny stories, while -"

"'Life is real and life is earnest,' eh? I reckon that my ludicrous bump is a bit overdeveloped, but this is an eighteen haour leave, for me, and I'm trying tew make myself forget the dust and din of the battle. It's been pretty strenuous, you know and I'm plumb tired."

Instantly the girl was at his side, repentant and sympathetic, for all at once he appeared, and his voice sounded, very weary. With the lightest possible mothering touch she passed her hand over his bushy hair, and said in a soothing tone, "We won't talk another word of politics while you're hyar," and with her next breath added, "But I dew so want you tew win. You're going tew, aren't you, Abe?"

"I sure hope so, child, but — I don't know. I'm in a tough fight and with mighty little ammunition, it seems. Money talks, as I told you a while ago, and the machine is beginning tew spend it for Clayton, like a drunken sailor."

"What abaout the law?" broke in Virgil. "I thought—"

"Oh, the Corrupt Practice Act in this State doesn't apply tew expenditures by candidates for Congress, so they can go as far as they like. Not that that makes any particular difference, for there are a thousand reasonably safe ways of beating a law of that kind. I've almost no money that I can spend in getting the nomination, although some of my good friends have voluntarily sent in small campaign contributions, while they're printing newspaper advertisements, hiring workers and halls, and I've been told that in a day or two Clayton's going to send aout tew every voter in the District a pamphlet with his picture, record and eulogistic comments by the Press, the Politicians and the Pulpit. Oh, they're not missing any bets, naow and I'm not missing any sleep. I'm going tew keep on fighting until I'm dragged aout, and if I'm licked, I'm licked, and -"

"And you can rest up for the next time in your own little haouse," cried Omie. "Did you see it when you came up — it's almost done?"

"You bet I saw it, and was plumb tickled tew death with it."

"Oh, you never went in!"

"No. I thought maybe —"

"That I'd want tew show it tew you? Of course I'm just dying tew, and we'll go there right after supper. Only you're not going tew get licked. Somehaow I just know you're going tew win."

CHAPTER III

ADDITIONAL FUEL

"Where are you two going?" called Virgil, as his sister and the State's Attorney started down the veranda steps after supper.

"Oh, just daown tew look over Abe's new haouse,"

answered the former.

"Better step along right lively, then. There's a thunder storm coming up, and it's coming right fast,

or I'm a bum weather prophet."

"We'll be back in two shakes of a lamb's tail," laughed the girl over her shoulder, all her natural, sunny self again. Then she challenged, "I'll race you, if you'll give me a head start tew the gate, Long Legs."

"Done!"

Omie hurried ahead, passed through the four-bar gate and deliberately closed and latched it after her before she called, "I'm ready."

"Cheater! But I'll lick you, just the same. Go!"
The girl started away like a flurry of wind, with her thin skirt whipping about her legs and her hair bobbing wildly, but Abe's down-hill charge was more like a tornado, each stride covering close to seven feet of ground. The closed gate served as almost no check at all. He took it in a stride, vaulting it cleanly with his left hand barely touching the topmost bar. Omie's heart jumped, for she had not been able to resist the temptation to which Lot's wife had fallen victim. A moment later and he went charging past her, crying, "Come on. Hurry! Hurry! We haven't got all day, and it's beginning tew sprinkle already."

"Oh, please wait for me," she begged, breathlessly, and he slowed down just enough so that she could catch up with him and seize the hand which he reached back to her. Then he pulled her along, almost off her feet, laughing and breathless, with her face rosy and hair in merry disorder; nor did he stop at the knoll's sharp rise, but only when they stood at the open doorway of the new house and were drawing quick breaths, redolent with the odor of new pine boards and cedar shingles.

"Gracious," gasped Omie, as soon as she could speak at all, "I never — went so fast — before — in my life, I don't guess."

"We're living in a mighty fast age, and have tew travel if we're tew get anywhere," he replied solemnly. "Ever hear the story of the furriner aout on the western plains who'd been riding for haours withaout reaching his destination or even meeting a soul?" Omie shook her head. "Well, finally he met up with a caowboy and asked him haow far it was tew the Double Bar ranch. 'Oh, abaout five miles, straight ahead," was the answer. He rode on for another haour and met another herder. Asked the same question and got identically the same answer. Rode on for half an haour more and the same thing happened. Then he leaned over and patted his horse's neck, saying, 'Well, thank God, we're holding aour own, old timer.'"

The girl laughed with the soft, gurgling note which so delighted him, and he gave the hand he was still unconsciously holding an appreciative squeeze, whereupon she suddenly flushed a still deeper red and rather hastily withdrew it from his clasp.

"Naow," said she, "we're going tew make a tour of inspection, and I'll explain just what each of the three rooms is going tew be; but you have got tew use

your imagination and see all the make-believe furniture, curtains, pictures and books as I point them aout — oh, I wish it wasn't so dark. Virgil was right about the storm, I'm afraid."

They turned and looked up the valley towards the Southwest, where a heavy, low-hanging canopy of storm clouds covered the blue almost to its zenith. Its fringe of "mare's-tails" was almost over their heads and scattering down big drops of water as it was shaken by the rising wind. In the distance appeared a shimmer of pale light, followed by an ominous growl of thunder. The tempest was coming, and with a rush typical of that mountain region.

"Reckon we'd better postpone aour personally conducted tour until to-morrow, and be getting back faster than we came," remarked Abe with some disappointment.

"No, no. My legs just won't stand it, they're all wobbly, naow," the girl laughed. "Besides, it's only going tew be a summer tempest and will have passed over in no time. Look! It's coming like lightning, literally. And hyar's the rain!"

Come it did. First merely a staccato patter on the shingled roof; but this increased in a steady crescendo to a rattle like that of a snare drum, and a silvery sheet was let down in front of the doorway. The full force of the tempestuous wind smote them a moment later, arriving with a whoop and a howl. It set the branches of the near-by trees to creaking and rattling; it tore off full clusters of leaves and sent them whirling away; it blew the sheeted rain in at the doorway and drove the two scurrying into the almost darkened room for shelter. Through a paneless window opening they could see the black curtain of clouds rent again and again with rapier-like slashes of lightning, while the

heavens thundered, the crashes echoing from mountain-side to mountain-side as though an artillery duel were in progress between armies entrenched in their respective summits. The noise of thunder, wind and rain joined in a tumult of sound above which their voices were hardly audible even when they shouted, but Abe could see in the lightning's glare that the girl was frightened — white and large-eyed.

"Nothing tew be scared of, Omie," he bellowed, and although she stood almost within reach of his hand, he scarcely heard her reply, which she uttered in a voice meant to be brave and laughing, "I'm not scared—

very. Only the thunder —"

"Pshaw, 'sticks and stones may break my bones, but saound will never hurt me,'" he answered.

"Oh, I know it's silly, and that the lightning's what does the damage, but I like tew see that, while the bangs remind me of — of guns, and I hate them."

"Well, it'll be over in a few minutes. Hang on, little girl." His words were soothing even though he

shouted them.

"I feel like a little girl, and — I'd *like* tew hang on tew your hand, if you don't mind, Abe."

Her childlikeness aroused a protective compassion in the man's heart and he stepped closer and reached out his hand to her. With a nervous little laugh she seized it in both of hers and he could feel the trembling of her body through the medium of her tightly clinging fingers.

"That better? It's passing by, already. Hark!"
The last word had hardly passed his lips when it seemed as though the retreating army fired a last tremendous broadside with its heaviest guns. A blinding flash rent the darkness outside the doorway and, simultaneous with it and the terrific clap of thunder over-

head, came the sound of a ripping and splintering, as the bolt tore through the heart of a young tree only a few yards distant. Their flesh tingled with the electric charge in the rain-filled air. Omie screamed and jumped. Her foot struck against a loose piece of lumber lying on the unfinished floor and she pitched forward. After that blinding flash the blackness seemed absolute; but Abe caught her, throwing out his free arm purely by instinct. He gathered her young, supple body to him and held her close, in a protecting, comforting embrace, which drew still closer when another, though somewhat lesser, crash followed immediately. Omie's arms slipped about his massive frame, her fingers clutched the back of his coat and, with eyes tightly closed, she pressed her face against his breast. She was now sobbing, rather hysterically, and, bending his head down until his cheek rested on her tumbled, silken hair, he began to speak quieting words, with little snatches of endearing phrases such as a man might use to a terrified child.

Suddenly he stopped short and lifted his head with a jerk. His arms lessened their tension, although they did not entirely release her, and, if any one had been there to witness the change which came over his countenance, now faintly disclosed by the growing light, he would have seen a look akin to dismay creep into his eyes.

Abe had thought of another such tempest, and another man and another woman in each other's arms, within the shelter of a new-built home. To all outward appearance history, as it was commonly known, was repeating itself in a startling fashion, and, although he knew that it was in appearance only, for there was no passion in his soul — nothing but protecting affection

— he thanked God that another person was not there to see and perhaps to misconstrue.

The rain was still pouring down steadily, but the light was flooding back as the cloud-pack lifted above the western rim of hills and let through the horizontal rays of the setting sun, as ruddy as burnished copper, now. Omie was not yet aware of it, for her eyes were still tightly shut, and she made no move to change her position, continuing to cling almost desperately to him, although her sobs diminished and finally ceased alto-

gether, with a half-audible little gasp.

And then — There was a sound just outside the door, swiftly running steps, and into the aperture leaped Noah Fugate, the barest instant before the tableau within the room had its curtain. The youth's clothing was drenched and his long black hair streaked down over his eyes and clinging to his brow. He halted sharply on realizing that the new cabin held occupants, and his expression of surprise changed to one of black anger with kaleidoscopic suddenness, as he swept his hair back and recognized the pair, who had hardly yet moved free of their mutual embrace. At the noise of the intrusion Omie half-turned in Abe's arms, and, when she saw Noah almost within arm's length of them, the warm blood dyed her neck and cheeks crimson and as quickly receded, leaving her face strangely pale.

For an instant, which seemed to all of them immeasurably prolonged, none of the three spoke. Then Noah demanded hotly, "What in h—l air you dewing

hyar . . . with her, Abe Blount?"

Although his heart was both hot and heavy, the man answered quietly, "We came daown tew look over the new haouse, Noey, and got caught by the storm, just as you did."

"Hit's a lie! You brought her hyar so's you could hug and kiss her, aout uv sight. I knows hit, and I won't have hit! And maybe that hain't all—"

"That's enough!" Abe broke sharply in on the thick passion of his utterance. "Don't you dare say

another word."

"I dare say anything I d—n please. Everybody knows abaout what your paw—"

"STOP!"

Abe's face was suddenly a picture of blazing wrath so terrible that Omie shrank back, and Noah retreated a step as his cousin strode forward with his arm raised and huge fist clenched. It was an involuntary movement on the part of the younger man for there was no suggestion of fear in his look, only hate.

Very slowly Abe's arm dropped to his side and his fist unclenched, although his fingers continued to work.

"Listen tew me, Noey," he said slowly. "I've told you the exact truth, and you know it. Omie was frightened by the bolt that struck just aoutside the door, stumbled and I caught her, that's all. But, because of what happened before I was born, I won't have even what I've told you, or what you've seen, mentioned aoutside. You understand, and there's nothing more tew be said."

For another moment the two men stood, immovable, looking straight into each other's eyes — in those of one undisguised fury; in those of the other indomitable will. Neither conquered. Unvanquished, Noah turned deliberately on his heel and walked out into the lessening rain, and Abe faced the girl, his countenance the picture of sorrow and distress.

"You see, Omie? I have tew pay the penalty of a false reputation, and, if I have friends, they may be called upon tew suffer along with me, because of their

friendship. I'm terribly sorry that it happened — I can't tell you haow sorry."

She answered bravely, "You needn't be, Abe. Dew you suppose I care what he said, or — or thought?" She looked unwaveringly up at him an instant before her eyes fell.

"Thank you for that. It means a lot tew me, Omie; but I'd give abaout everything I possess if it hadn't happened. What did he mean, though, by saying that he wouldn't have it? What was it tew him, anyway?"

"Why — why —" she stammered, "I reckon it's because he — he's been trying tew — tew make love tew me."

Her voice dropped to a bare whisper as she finished the sentence.

"He has? That unruly young cub?" Abe stopped as a new thought entered his mind, giving him a distinct mental shock. "And—and you, Omie? Dew you—?"

"Dew I love him?" Her scornful inflection was answer enough to the question which she completed for him. Then, under his steady, still-questioning gaze, her color flared high again, her lips half parted and her breathing quickened. It was for her a moment of awakening to a cataclysmic realization. Omie's brain swam dizzily from the inrush of hot blood that was coursing madly through all of her veins, under the propulsion of her painfully throbbing heart. Waves of alternating heat and cold passed over her body. The girl's sensations were utterly strange to her, a combination of delirious ecstasy and anguish. Now she knew. There was no need for her to ask herself the question, "Am I in love with Abe?" It had come, tempestuously, with the tempest, leaving her suddenly weak and dismayed, eager to get away, to flee from

him — from every one — and hide somewhere that she might think and feel; feel in recollection his strong arms holding her close, her body clinging to his, the touch of his cheek against her hair, which had set her a-tingle, like the electric charge in the air when the lightning's bolt struck, and had stirred within her undreamed of longings of mind, soul and body. No one else had ever thrilled her being in such fashion. No one else ever could, or would, she thought, as her eyes dropped to evade his searching look. Without a word she sprang through the doorway and fled down the slope of the little knoll like a frightened thing, leaving the man completely astonished.

Unversed in womankind, he had no conception of the truth, and set her peculiar behavior down to reaction from her two recent unpleasant experiences. She was upset and frightened, naturally, he told himself, as he hastened after her.

Once more he overtook her before she had covered half the return distance; but this time she was not laughing gayly. She tried to keep her face turned away, but Abe observed, with another shock, that there were apparently tears mingled with the rain drops on her young face. He shortened his stride to match the hurried walk into which she had fallen, and for several rods continued in troubled silence, not knowing what to say to her. At length he asked, hesitatingly, "Is anything the matter, Omie?"

The girl responded with a brave white lie. "No. My — my head aches a little. The storm —"

They had reached the foot-bridge over the swollen creek and she paused there with her hand on the railing.

"Naow that's too bad; but I don't wonder. Aren't you coming up tew the office again?"

"I don't guess so, this evening. Reckon I'll — go tew bed. Good-night, Abe."

Her voice choked a little, and, without looking at him or offering him her hand, she turned quickly and hurried across to her home. The man gave his head a sympathetic shake and, as he started to climb the steep rise to the House of Happiness, all of the spring had gone out of his step. On reaching her own doorway Omie had turned for an instant, then she entered her darkened bedroom, closed the door and, after standing irresolutely by the side of her bed for a moment, threw herself upon it with a smothered sob.

Virgil greeted Abe at the door, his somewhat anxious expression changing to a smile of relief.

"I was just getting ready tew go and see if the bolt that struck somewhere up on the knoll singed you, but I see that it didn't. Did you get wet? Where's Omie—changing her clothes?"

"No, tew everything. We were under cover, but the storm, especially that bolt which bisected one of my best young trees, gave Omie a little headache, and she's turned in, I reckon. Anyway, she said she wouldn't be over again to-night. Hello, Billy. You hyar?"

"Haowdy, Abe," responded the preacher, who had been waiting for him to return, and now gripped his hand in an eager, excited manner. "I've got something fer you. You recollec' my tellin' you abaout thet thar moonshiner what had repented him uv his sins and given me information consarnin' the men what war furnishin' the money and the protection fer the bootleggers? Well, he's gone further then thet, naow. He's give me a writin', signed with his mark, an' sworn tew thet hit's the truth, the whole truth and nothin'

but the truth, and hit's fer you, tew use in your fight agin the forces uv iniquity."

"Hmmm. That's mighty interesting, and it was mighty good of you tew have got it, Billy. But, I don't know abaout using it — I'll have tew think it over right smart. A serious charge like that, unless it can be supported, might prove tew be a two-edged sword and cut both ways. Still, a sworn affidavit — It may help me tew get other and first-hand evidence. Have you brought it with you?"

The preacher drew from his pocket a rather soiled sheet of foolscap and passed it to Abe, proudly. The State's Attorney recognized the writing as Billy's own painfully scrawled and quaintly spelled handiwork, and, knowing the labor which it had involved, felt a warm glow of appreciation. Then he began to read it, slowly and carefully. It was practically the same story which Billy had outlined to them, but in more detail, and with every name which the writer had been able to remember set down in cold black and white, damningly - among them that of the Honorable H. Clay Clayton. The men who had drunkenly boasted of their friends in high places had indeed first put something in their mouths to steal away their brains. The signature, by a crude mark, and the formal affidavit were on the back of the sheet and, when Abe had turned it over and read that name, he gave a low whistle of surprise. For the man who was deliberately risking perhaps his very life to help him win was none other than his uncle, Noah's father!

"Desty Fugate!" he exclaimed.

"Hit's the truth, Abe — the man whose still you cut up and thet you tried in the court uv the law, yourself. 'The Lord moves in a mysterious way His wonders tew perform.' He put hit in Desty Fugate's heart

tew help you, thet he had once thought war his enemy."

"I reckon He acted through one of His human agents, as He generally does, and that you could tell the agent's name, Billy," said the other, smiling, yet considerably moved. "I'm right glad tew have this, for it proves that I was right abaout Desty; but — I can't use it, naow."

"You kin! He wants fer you tew. And he's ready tew go a-fore a jury and sware that what's writ daown thar is true. He sez thet, if you won't dew hit, when hit'll dew the most good, he's a-goin' tew tell the story hisself. And you kain't stop him. And he's give me the right tew tell hit, too. Dew you think thet *I* air afeered uv 'em and what they may dew, whatever?"

Billy's eyes flashed and his countenance took on something of the look of illuminated spiritual resolve which the militant saints of old must have worn when they faced every danger, even martyrdom, unafraid, for the cause of righteousness.

Abe did not show how deeply he was moved by this declaration. He could not allow these friends of his to put themselves in danger by making such a serious and shocking charge against men high in the esteem of their fellows, and for him to do it personally might lay him open to a charge of cowardly slander and bring both professional and political ruin. He must have time to think the matter out, quietly, and in the meanwhile hold these two zealous enthusiasts in check.

He temporized by saying, "Well, I'll see — only I want you to promise me that you won't breathe a word of this to any one until I say the word, Billy."

Rather reluctantly and with obvious disappointment,

Billy agreed.

The next morning Omie was not present at the early breakfast which had been prepared for Abe, having sent word by Camille that her head still ached, and the man had to depart without seeing either the girl or the interior of his new cottage home. But the brief trip, which had been, like life in miniature, a combination of good and evil, sunshine and storm, laughter and tears, had stiffened up his shaken resolve and he plunged anew into his work and campaign with eager zest. And it must be written that in the tremendous press of the two, during the fortnight which followed, he very rarely thought of either the girl or the home, save for a rare moment occasionally, after he had tumbled into bed, in the brief drowsy period between his wakeful planning for the morrow and the coming of sleep born of utter weariness.

It was not so with Omie, however.

CHAPTER IV

THE POT BOILS

The State's Attorney's single assistant was an enthusiastic, hard-working young man by the name of John Fay. His ancestry was of the mountains, and the little town of Fayville derived its name from the family; but he had been born, brought up and educated in Culverton City, and it was there that he, little more than a boy, had first met the young lawyer, Abe Blount, and fallen under the spell of his personality and influence. Their liking had become mutual; Abe had grown to be a sort of mentor for the youth, had turned his feet into the field of the law, helped him with his studies, and, after he had been admitted to the bar, given him a desk in his own office.

While his friend was serving as Sheriff, young Fay had handled many of the minor cases which Abe's clients brought in, and he was quite naturally selected as his assistant when the Sheriff returned to the practice of law as State's Attorney.

If Abe could be said to have a manager for his campaign, Fay occupied the position, for, although the candidate made his own plans, he was fully in his confidence and the two talked over every move, together. Because of his connections and wide acquaintanceship in Culverton City the younger man had assumed particular charge of the campaign there, and, through his popularity, ceaseless energy and unbounded enthusiasm, he had succeeded in building up a fairly substantial following for his candidate, although they both recognized the fact that that locality, as well as the

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highly optimistic over the prospect.

On the morning of the fifth day before the primaries, Fay returned from an overnight visit to his home town and entered the office with his young good-looking face almost haggard from the strain of concentrated campaigning until well after midnight and his curly hair damp and clinging to his temples from excitement and hard riding.

Abe was deeply engrossed in the preparation of a brief and greeted his arrival merely by a nod and the words, "'Morning, John," without raising his eyes

from his papers.

The younger man recognized the "Silence" sign, threw himself wearily into a chair and began to fan himself with his hat. For a time there was no sound in the little office except the scratching of the lopsided stub pen with which Abe was making notes in his self-evolved system of shorthand, and the irritating buzz of a horse-fly which continually banged his multiple-eyed head against the upper window pane in an effort to get outside, although the lower half of the window was wide open. Finally Fay's keyed-up nerves could stand it not an instant longer. He jumped up, smashed the fly against the glass, and then snatched the offending implement of industry from his chief's hand.

Abe looked at him in mild surprise, and then, reading ill-omened tidings on his friend's face, asked, "What's up, John?"

The other dropped into a chair by the corner of the desk and responded, savagely, "Everything's up — unless a miracle happens."

The expression on Abe's countenance did not change.

He merely swung half around in his chair, stuck out his legs and thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, waiting for the explosion.

It came.

"I spent six damnable haours last night listening first tew bad news and then to worse. The machine has been using gold thread galore and got things sewed up tight, there. We're steadily losing graound in the taowns every day, and something drastic's got tew be done in a hurry or we're licked tew a frazzle."

"I reckon. Well, have you got anything tew suggest?"

"Yes, I have; and I'm not alone in suggesting it. We've simply got tew take a chance, Abe, and spring that Fugate affidavit — it's aour only hope. Macey said the same thing last night, and he's a pretty wise bird concerning politics — you remember my telling you abaout Mark Macey, the fellow who was a school chum of mine and is naow holding daown a desk job on The News?"

"The one who told you that nine aout of ten of their editorial and reportorial staff, including 'the old man,' himself, were going tew vote for me?" asked the other, with a suggestion of a twinkle lighting up his tired eyes.

"Yes, and it's a fact. He still says so. You've got tew remember that even the 'old man' is a 'hired man' but their votes are their own, even if they have tew write and print the sort of stuff they are handing aout daily, or lose their jobs. They realize it's bunk, even if ninety-nine aout of every hundred of their readers take it for gospel truth just because they see it in print. Oh, you know that as well as I dew." Abe nodded. "I talked with him for an haour, last night, and he said that, if we hadn't anything more tew spring

than we'd sprung already, we're done for; that Clayton has every advantage; he's already in office - entrenched; his record is good; he's popular; he's got the machine and plenty of funds back of him and -" Fay stopped for lack of breath and his voice choked a little. "- and he's coming stronger every day, while we're slipping back. Well, I told him in confidence abaout that affidavit that you've been keeping in the safe — only the gist of it, of course, and not mentioning any names but Clayton's - and he said, 'For God's sake spring it! Is Abe Blount going tew take it tew bed with him? It's your one chance. Clayton'll yell like a stuck pig and threaten all sorts of things, of course; but he won't dare to take any action for fear that you may have the goods on him, and it might turn the tide at the eleventh haour.' And I say the same. Let's show up that darned hypocrite — he's simply getting away with murder, naow."

During this outburst, and for an appreciable time after it, Abe sat without altering his position, looking out of the window, his lips pursed in a soundless whistle, while the younger man fidgeted nervously in his chair. Then the candidate spoke.

"I reckon that I've gone over the pros and cons of all those arguments a hundred times already, in my mind, and haven't yet decided what's best tew dew, John. You and your friend are both young; youth is impetuous and careless of consequence, but I'm trying tew consider every possibility. The thing is loaded with dynamite and there's no knowing which way it'll explode."

"Don't I know that, too? Just the same, I say, 'touch a match tew the fuse and take a chance.' It's aour only one. As things stand to-day we're done. The machine will get out the big vote in the taowns and

we can't be sure of getting half — no, nor a quarter — of the maountaineers to the polls. They haven't got the voting habit. Of course it *might* back-fire and wipe us off the map; but we may as well be killed for a sheep as a lamb."

"Well, the Court will take the matter under advisement, again, and let you know the decision before night, John. And don't feel so badly abaout the situation, son. I'll admit that you've brought bad news; but I had anticipated it — and shan't let it drive me tew drink."

Fay smiled for the first time. Then his face grew troubled again, and he said, "I told you that I had bad news — and worse. And it is, in a way. I heard something else daown there that you ought tew hear abaout. You know those damnable lies abaout you that they've been passing araound, sub rosa. Well, they've got a new one, naow. I heard it from two or three sources. It seems tew have started in the coal mines — the People's Party — but Clayton's craowd is using it for all they're worth and Macey got it direct from one of his right-hand men. Of course I told 'em that it was a damned lie and tew get busy contradicting it; but the story is all over the place and hurting us, especially among the Law and Order craowd and the women."

Abe's lanky form stiffened, slightly, but his expression did not change until Fay made the blunt announcement, "They're saying that abaout two weeks ago you were caught in the dark in an untenanted cabin with a young girl."

The State's Attorney's countenance grew white and his eyes changed to a steely gray.

"Is that — all?" he demanded.

"No. They say that the girl was Virgil Gayheart's kid sister, up at Smiling Pass."

Instantly Abe was on his feet, his arm raised and fist clenched as it had been against Noah Fugate. Now his face was mottled, his eyes flaming with passion. In a voice which was not loud, but yet terrible, he burst out, "By heaven, if I ever hear, or hear of, any man repeating that story, I'll - no, I won't kill him, but I'll thrash him within a hair's breadth of his life." Slowly his arm sank, the fire and cloud died out of his face, leaving it ashen-hued, his voice dropped and grew troubled. "Yet haow can I dew even that? For the story's literally true, John. It's only the implication, the insinuation made by a whisper, a lifted eyebrow, a meaning smile that's a damned lie." He went on, more quietly, to recount what had really occurred during the storm and added, "But she isn't a kid, she's a young woman and a mighty attractive one, which makes the story more plausible, and worse. It's too late tew stop it at its source, naow, but I'm going tew find that source - Noey Fugate - as soon as the Lord will let me, and - I don't know what then, except that he'll know I've been tew see him."

"Steady, Abe. There's no question but that he deserves anything that you'd hand him, but that milk's spilt. What we especially want tew dew is stop its spreading, if we can; although hanged if I know haow. Why, even Clayton made reference tew it, by innuendo, in his speech night before last, and Macey said that it got him a big hand, which means that a lot, at least, of his auditors knew what he had reference tew."

"What did he say?"

"Macey could remember only in a general way—the speech wasn't taken daown and printed; but he said that it was tew the effect that *his* private life, like his political record, was an open book, and he thanked God that there was no reason why *he* couldn't look any

pure woman in the eyes. It was the Pharisee, wasn't it, who thanked God that he was not as other men? And Christ classed them with the hypocrites."

Abe did not answer immediately. His hands slowly clenched, his jaw set and the lines about his mouth seemed to deepen. They were visible evidences of the terrific eruption occurring within his soul, like turmoil on the ocean's surface when, deep below, its bed is rent asunder by an earthquake. There was a vibrant note in his voice, too, when he finally spoke, which would have been a tremble of rage if his control had been a little less nearly complete.

"I'm right sorry for his daughter, John, but we're going tew take issue with that statement and open tew the public gaze at least one hidden leaf in that book he mentioned. You've been urging me tew take a chance; I'll take that chance, naow. If he wants tew sue me for malicious slander and defamation of character, let him! And for the rest, I say, with Peter Sterling, 'Votes be damned!'"

"That's the stuff, Abe." His friend sprang up and grasped his hand hard. "I knew you wouldn't stand for *that* withaout hitting back, and straight from the shoulder. When will you dew it?"

"Soon as possible; I'd like tew dew it this minute. Can you hire a place tew speak in and get me an audience in Culverton City — we'll carry the fight right intew his own bailiwick — by to-morrow night?"

tew his own bailiwick — by to-morrow night?"

"Can a duck swim? I'll get the Opera House —
there's nothing going on weather like this, except the
movies three times a week. I'll get flyers printed and
distributed, and I'll get a story in the morning paper
promising folks the sensation of their young lives, and
you won't be able tew keep 'em away with a machine
gun. Wait and see. G'by."

He snatched his hat from the desk and fairly sprinted out of the office, his face no longer worn and weary looking, but lighted up with the glow of fresh enthusiasm and youthful eagerness.

Abe also left, a moment later, and, although he did not run, his long stride covered the ground with a speed equal to the quick trot of a smaller man.

The State's Attorney reached Smiling Pass in close to record time, with his horse breathing hard and streaked with lather. For once the long ride in the sunlight under the smiling sky, the communion with nature in her most peaceful mood, and physical exercise had neither calmed the angry tumult in his heart nor cooled his heated thoughts. There was storm within his brain and the shadow of it hung over his countenance. Virgil, passing from one building to another in the wake of a dozen small boys, caught sight of him thundering up the last stretch of creek road. He guessed that something was amiss, ordered his charges to go on, and himself ran down to open the gate.

Abe reined up, just inside, and his friend caught the bit of the excited horse and unconsciously patted his dripping neck as he looked inquiringly up at the rider.

Without greeting or preamble Abe demanded, "Where's Noey?"

- "I don't know. He's gone."
- "Gone? When?"
- "Abaout two weeks ago. I think it was the night that you were up hyar. He hasn't shown up, either at the school or his paw's cabin, since."
 - "And you don't know where —?"
 - "No. Desty was plumb worried abaout him for a

week or so, but then some one or other brought him word that Noey had gone tew get himself a job in one of the coal mines. Reckon that the high pay they're offering tew strike-breakers was too much of a temptation, but he's a fool, for he was getting along wonderfully, hyar."

"He's worse than a fool; but not for clearing aout."

"What's wrong, Abe?"

Virgil had taken note of the sudden change in his visitor's appearance, a general relaxation and letting down which was made manifest by the way his body drooped wearily over the pummel of the saddle and the tension went out of the muscles of his jaw, leaving his face merely drawn and tired-looking.

"You may as well know — you ought tew know, Virge. I didn't tell you abaout it on the night of the thunder storm because I didn't think that it was neces-

sary. But naow —"

He again recounted fully what had occurred at the new cottage, and Virgil experienced all of the same emotions which the other had undergone during Fay's

repetition of the story.

"The dirty dogs,—and damn Noey Fugate!" he cried, when Abe had finished. "It makes me want tew dig aout my old army rifle and start on a man-hunt, myself. Blame you? Nonsense. Why should I blame you? Good Lord, I'd trust you with Omie, or any other girl, as soon as I would myself."

His hand, wet with lather from the horse, gripped Abe's hard.

"Where is Omie?" asked the other as an afterthought.

"Daown at the school-haouse. Got a third-grade class this haour, but she'll be back for dinner, and mighty glad tew see you."

"No. I can't stop; not another minute. I've got tew see Desty on my way daown, for I'm planning tew spring his affidavit to-morrow night."

"Good!"

"That remains tew be seen. But, good or bad, I'm going tew make known the truth abaout the Honorable H. Clay Clayton, if I can. Reckon that they'll call me a vile traducer and assassin and a lot of other choice names; but at least I'll dew it in the open; I won't stick a knife in his back under cover of the darkness. Explain tew Omie and the others why I didn't stop, won't you? And tell her — no, better not tell her anything, especially abaout this. Haow is she?"

"Not so good. Been sort of off her feed for a couple of weeks, and we haven't been able tew get anything aout of her. Reckon I understand, naow. Besides, she's sort of grown up, this summer, and is beginning tew take the world pretty seriously; been worrying abaout you and your fight a good deal, too. She thinks

a heap of you, Abe."

"Bless her! And I of her. I couldn't care any more for her if she were my own sister, or daughter. She might almost be, you know, as far as age is concerned." Abe's face lighted up a little with a suggestion of a smile. "Give her my love, Virge."

He turned his mount and was off again at a hard canter. And, through the school-room window, Omie caught sight of him riding past without even a glance in her direction, and suddenly the figures on the blackboard grew misty and wavering before her eyes.

For twenty-four hours, almost without ceasing, John Fay had worked like a dog, a slave, a madman, a Trojan. Now the evening of the second day had come and his Herculean task was done, and well done. As-

sisted by a half-a-dozen of his former comrades, whose aid he had enlisted and who, catching some of his own infectious enthusiasm, had taken the day off from their respective businesses, he had accomplished all that he had promised his chief, and more. The political editor of the Culverton daily newspaper had drastically blue penciled Macey's half-column story announcing the rally, cutting it to about a "stick," but there was news, spelled with a capital N, in the open hint of a bombshell which the State's Attorney was going to explode, and he had permitted enough to get in to touch a spark to inflammable curiosity. Hundreds of thin paper flyers, hastily printed and distributed, had fanned the flame, for they bore the catch words, "Abe Blount to Speak Bluntly. A plain man will tell the people plain facts which they have a right to know." Lip rumor had done the rest.

The young lawyer had proved himself an able general. Sensation — indefinite, but all the more intriguing for that — was in the air, and many who were red hot for Clayton fully intended to be present. If anything out of the ordinary was actually to be sprung, they wanted to hear it with their own ears. Fay had foreseen this, and to make sure that the audience would be a friendly one, he and his workers had, by personal and telephoned appeal, pledged enough men and women who were friendly to the State's Attorney to attend the rally, and come early, so that the auditorium would be packed. Not content with this, and realizing the news value of a crowd outside the door unable to get in, he had arranged to have a cornetist stationed on the steps, illuminated by red fire, playing martial and patriotic airs from seven-thirty until the speaking should commence.

All this John Fay had, with honest pride, reported

to his chief upon the latter's arrival at the hotel just in time for a hasty supper; and the further fact that ten of the city's prominent men and women were to lend added impressiveness to the occasion by gracing the platform, and that his old friend and early patron, the Judge, had agreed to introduce him. Abe thanked him with few words, but they were enough.

"Have you got your speech written aout?" Fay had inquired. "The reporters have been haowling for the

'copy' of it, already."

"They'll have tew keep on haowling, and take it stenographically, if they want it. I never wrote aout a political speech in my life, and this one, above all, has got tew be the result of the moment's inspiration; — pray heaven I may have some, John," was the State's Attorney's answer.

Now the hour had arrived, and Fay viewed the result of his labors with combined pride and nervous quakings. The Opera House was filled to its full five hundred capacity; the vestibule was filled; the steps outside were filled; the cornetist was playing a final Southern tune to a crowd of at least a hundred more on the sidewalk and street, who were loath to depart when he did, although there was not a chance of their getting even to the doors.

At one minute past eight o'clock the special invitees filed onto the stage and took their seats, welcomed by somewhat perfunctory applause; the crowd wanted the star, not the supporting mute chorus. "We want 'aour David'!" cried a big voice with a mountain twang, and the audience laughed and cheered.

And, as though in answer to the demand, Abe himself appeared, his towering, lanky form clad in an illfitting frock coat, his gray trousers bagging slightly at the knees and missing his boot tops by an inch. This was the signal for which Fay and his prime supporters, now scattered by design about the auditorium, had been waiting. Their concerted cheer and applause acted like so many matches touched to a plot of dry grass. The result seemed to be spontaneous combustion, for the audience rose up, en masse, applauding and cheering. It was kept up for close to two minutes, the benevolent conspirators starting the tumult afresh whenever it began to show signs of subsiding. When the audience resumed its seats with a clatter and rustle, the Judge stepped forward.

"Friends and fellow citizens," he said. "My conception of the duty of one who is tew introduce a speaker whom everybody knows, personally, or by his reputation for notable achievements, is — tew introduce him. I take great pleasure in presenting tew you aour distinguished, fighting State's Attorney, Abraham Blount."

The Judge sat down, his part perfectly done. Again the applause broke out, and from the platform the auditorium looked like a sea the surface of which is whipped into dancing whitecaps — with here and there a rock of silence appearing to indicate the presence of a Clayton supporter.

Abe bowed his head slightly, in acknowledgment, and strode to the edge of the platform. For a full half minute he stood, quiet, stern and unnaturally pale, looking his audience over. Then he began to speak. His voice was even and unemotional, yet there was in it a vibrant note which carried it to the farthest corner.

CHAPTER V

THE POT BOILS OVER

For nearly three-quarters of an hour Abe's speech followed its customary course. The majority of his auditors gave him close attention and frequent applause; but in time some began to question in their minds whether anything out of the ordinary was going to occur, after all, and show a little disappointment, while five or six, who were of the other camp, got up and left, with no attempt to move quietly. Yet most of them seemed to feel that he was holding back; not merely reserving something for a climax, but laboring under some unusual restraint. Actors understand the dramatic value of this, and with Abe, who was not acting, it lent added conviction to his spoken words. He was quiet but forceful; he held them by sincerity and cold logic, rather than sensationalism and oratorical effects. Even his usual bits of apropos humor were mostly lacking.

But toward the close of the "Law and Order" part of his speech a new note began to creep into his words and voice alike, carrying with it a preliminary thrill, a sudden tension in his audience. It was like the electrical tingling in the atmosphere which sometimes precedes the breaking of a storm.

"But if obedience tew law should be the duty, respect tew law the delight, of all true citizens, haow much more so should it be the duty and delight of those who hold high office; of those who have unequivocably sworn to uphold and defend it; of those who, perhaps, have *made* it by their own votes in the

legislatures of State or Nation? We naturally look to them for example, inspiration, guidance. If they fail, wherein is aour hope? If the legislator breaks the law, especially if he breaks it with seeming impunity, can we expect Tom, Dick and Harry to obey it? Or expect them to suffer their punishment if they, lacking adroitness in the breach, are caught, withaout being tempted tew go the whole route and join the red ranks of Anarchy?

"Nothing is cheaper than lip service. Any one can proclaim allegiance tew the Flag, the Constitution, and all for which they stand. But unfortunately there are many that dew this whose secret acts belie their spoken words — and the former speak the more truly as well as the more laoudly in the end. I have touched frankly on the subject of prohibition. The Eighteenth Amendment is part of the law of the land. Yet you know, and I know, that there are plenty who voted for that law, and whose public utterances are all in favor of its continuance, who still always keep 'a leetle' in the haouse, or on the hip - in case of sudden sickness. (Laughter.) And that 'leetle' is by no means always old private stock which was lawfully in their possession prior to June twenty-ninth, Nineteen Twenty. (Loud laughter.) These gentlemen are the hip-pocket defenders of the law, and we can expect little from their leadership but general and increasing disregard of that, and of all law. If this particular piece of enacted legislation is repugnant tew their honest, though secret, views, and they and those who think with them are a majority of the people, let them cast aside hypocrisy and change it. The Constitutional right is theirs. Otherwise, let them obey it. If a nation which owes allegiance tew but one authority, the law which its people has accepted for their government, willfully disobeys that sovereignty it pronaounces its own inevitable doom. And the officers, of whatever station, who are elected tew create or tew administer that law, should be like Cæsar's wife in the play—'above suspicion.' When Suspicion points her shadowy finger at them there is danger; when she is substantiated there is disaster. Democracy suffers for their sins; reproach falls upon the Party which placed them in office.

"This is particularly true, to-day. There is a spirit of unrest and revolt in the air. Extremes — anything which has not yet been tried and faound wanting in some respect — beckon invitingly. The people are tired of being herded, voiceless, along devious, but prerouted, paths by machine-made politicians, whose paower is the paower of money and a practiced skill in manipulating the wires. They want, and need, leaders, not masters. Above all they want and need men on whose honesty and integrity they can rely. Those who have bartered these primary requisites to satisfy some weak or wicked desire dew not deserve tew be again entrusted with authority.

"For some minutes I have been talking generalities, but there are plenty of specific instances tew be faound; yes, within aour own state. I naow purpose tew give you a definite example of what I have been referring tew, generally. It is not a pleasant thing tew have tew dew. The truth is not always pleasant, but there are times when the most disagreeable of truths must be disclosed; a diseased spot in the human body or the body politic is not pleasant, but that is no reason for ignoring its existence. The sooner either is known, the sooner it will be remedied. I shall present it in the nature of a story, but a *true* story which has been put in the form of an affidavit and duly sworn tew. That affidavit is in my possession. I have it — hyar!"

As Abe spoke these words and drew from his inside breast pocket the soiled sheet of foolscap, there was a sharp intaking of breath, throughout the audience, which sounded like a great sigh. There was a general rustle and creaking of chairs as his hearers leaned eagerly forward, tensing themselves for what was coming.

"The story is in two parts," he continued, evenly. "The first part contains merely hearsay evidence, as we lawyers call testimony of the type of 'He told me that such and such a think had happened.' It is not generally admissible evidence in a court of law; but this is not a court of law. All stories beginning, 'They say' which are told, or secretly whispered, in a political campaign are not true. This one is. The man who told it — not tew me, for I obtained it later — and who signed and attested it, has been a moonshiner and bootlegger, a breaker of the law. He is that no longer. He made this statement — confession, if you like — of his own free will and accord when he put off the old life. It is a thing filled with potential danger tew him, but knowledge of that fact did not deter him. This is a token of his sincerity, and the truth of the story.

"I am going tew read what I call 'Part One' simply because it has a vital connection with the second part. For reasons which will, I think, be obvious, I shall not mention the men involved, by name, for they are unequivocably charged with being principals in, or accessories tew, a serious crime against the state. When the time is ripe — when other and first-hand evidence is secured against them — their names and this affidavit will be placed in the hands of proper authorities for prosecution . . . and that time will soon come, my friends. To-night, haowever, I shall substitute for those names the letters A, B, C, D, and E. 'A' will

stand for a certain man, well-known by name to most of you, who is deep, very deep in the affairs of state and the councils of the party tew which we belong."

"Malley!" whispered Fay, under his breath. He had been listening, spellbound, to his chief's cautious yet highly effective handling of the "dynamite." And "Malley" whispered Macey to a fellow reporter in the gallery. "Malley — it's a hundred tew one shot."

"Better not hint it in print, son," answered the other.

Macey grinned. "Think I'm a damned fool?"

"'B' will stand for one who bears the honorable title of Judge, but who perverts justice for favor and dishonors the Bench on which he sits."

"Judge Siscomb," whispered Macey, and the other said, "Shut up! D'you want tew be tried for treason? Abe's getting off some fine back-handed honorary degree stuff, though."

"Yes, in the College of 'Hard Knocks."

"'C,'" continued the speaker, "for a lawyer of great ability and brilliant success as a defendants' counsel; once a man beyond reproach; naow one who prostitutes his high profession for larger gains — a hireling of law-breakers."

"Hot stuff!" came the whisper.

"'D,' for a widely known finacier, tew whom breach of the law has become a source of greatly increased income. 'E'—I will not naow describe 'E' tew you, for the charge which I have tew make against him is of a different nature, and he is the —'hero,' shall we say? — of Part Two of the story."

Abe paused for a moment and the buzz of whis-

pered conjecture and comment became general.

"For three years the author of this affidavit made a comfortable living at his illicit trade of supplying thirsty throats in the foothill taowns, and further, with maountain dew. His would have been an extremely profitable business, but for the fact that in this, as in most occupations to-day, the producer receives but a lean reward for his labor; the middleman gets the fat. The scene is laid in a tumbled-daown cabin on the aoutskirts of this very city, tew which he had brought an unusually large consignment of his manufactured product tew deliver tew three bootleggers who were tew distribute it in other and more distant sections. They are the middlemen, a step higher up in the hierarchy of the profession and as such versed in all its ramifications. In other words, they were 'in the know.'

"Assuming, as I hope I have a right tew, that none of you are familiar with the customs of the bootlegging fraternity [Laughter . . . a little high-pitched, for his audience was getting on edge] I will say that, whatever may be the fact elsewhere, in this part of the country whenever its members meet tew transact business or make a delivery tew a customer, part of their wet goods is immediately and mutually consumed. Oh, yes, the Billionaire pledges the health of the Bootlegger and is pledged in turn. One taste of liquor makes the whole world kin, naow-a-days. I have heard one maountaineer say that he has had tew drink with as many as ten different customers in one evening."

There was a tittering of laughter in one corner of the hall, where a man had exclaimed, soulfully, "Oh, for

a job like that! "

"You know that strong drink befuddles the brain and loosens the tongue, and aour 'White Mule' sure is strong drink. The maountaineer had been brought up on it; he could drink it almost like water and retain his faculties. Not so, his overlords. They talked, freely and boastfully. He listened with interest. With them

it was a case of temporary lunacy, for 'lunacy' means literally madness induced by moonshine. I will naow read tew you the first part of his affidavit, covering what was said."

He picked up the paper and began, lapsing into the pronunciation of his people, so that his hearers felt that

they were listening to the ex-bootlegger himself.

As he finished, he said, parenthetically, "You will please note especially what was said concerning aour E'— in effect that he was the, perhaps unsuspecting, tool of these others; a safe man tew have in a high office because of his popularity and unquestioned probity; that he was one of several supported by this political-bootlegging ring as a convenient cloak for their illegal activities.

"Part Two of the story also has its scene in this city, but amid very different surroundings. Instead of a shack, it is a handsome southern mansion with a pillared portico. The evidence differs, too. This time it is 'first hand' for the maker of this affidavit visited it, personally, again at night, himself tew supply one of his regular customers with corn whiskey — he made a purer and more potent distillation than any other maountaineer in the state, it is said. That purchaser was a lawbreaker, as well as the seller. But naow-adays the former's act has come tew be regarded by many as a venial sin, at the worst. Have we not read, perhaps with a smile, that even some Members of Congress still have their liquor bootlegged tew them in the office buildings devoted by the government tew their use, and even drink it in the restaurants under the dome of the Capitol itself, where the Eighteenth Amendment was framed and enthusiastically passed by their votes? At any event he was one who falls within the category of the 'hip-pocket defenders of the law, who keep a leetle in the haouse'— and you know haow I stand in relation tew such.

"But what interests me even more than that, at the present time, is this sworn statement." He read, "'He'—the owner of the haouse—'asked me in tew drink, and thar I met up with A, C and D, who joked with me fer a piece and then began tew talk politics with E, again. They war urgin' him tew run again fer Congress.' And the 'E' of both parts of this sworn story, ladies and gentlemen, with the name fully written aout in this affidavit, is—Henry Clay Clayton."

A tumult of sound swept through the audience, but Abe checked it as speedily as he could by raising his hand for silence, and concluded, "With this evidence that he is at least the catspaw for one of the most vicious rings within the state — and I charge nothing more — will the people of this Congressional District continue tew accept him as their leader and try tew return him tew the Haouse as their chosen Representative?"

"No!" yelled Fay, and the negation was wildly caught up all over the hall by the excited audience, which had risen to its collective feet as Abe stepped back, and were cheering and applauding loudly.

Preparatory to an early start back to Fayville, the State's Attorney and his assistant breakfasted at sixthirty, the next morning. It was a very good Southern breakfast, considering the hour; but, for all John Fay knew or cared, the oatmeal submerged in thick cream might have been boiled hay; the crispy sugar-cured ham and scrambled eggs, shoe-leather and sawdust; the steaming, aromatic black coffee, tepid dish-water. For, early as the hour was, he had already been out, obtained a copy of the *News*, and was still sputtering

from the douche of cold water which had extinguished the last spark of the blazing enthusiasm that had been his the night before. No sun shone, the day had dawned gray and unusually gloomy for midsummertime, he was in the gloomiest depths of the "morningafter" reaction, and correspondingly bitter toward the world in general, and the paper which he was shaking, as though *it* were to blame, in particular.

"I saw what Macey wrote for an introduction, and just look at the way some craven-souled, machine-owned, boot-licking desk editor has twisted it araound!" he cried. "Mace said, 'a stirring rally."

It comes aout, 'a skillfully staged rally."

"Well, wasn't it?" inquired Abe, mildly, without looking up from the cereal which he was eating with apparent relish. "Saounds tew me like a compliment

tew you and your ability as a manager."

"'Compliment' be d—d! It's a nasty, back-handed slap, and you know it, Chief. Here's another. 'The Opera Haouse held an audience of four hundred noisy Abe Blount supporters.' He wrote, 'Over six hundred enthusi—'"

"Place holds abaout five hundred, for a guess."

"What of it? Every one expects exaggeration by the Press, but this is a deliberate, intentional understatement. If it had been a Clayton rally I'll bet my shirt that they'd have said, 'a madly cheering craowd of close tew a thousand of aour most influential men and fairest women.' But what especially gets me is that headline. Look at it! "Fay pointed an accusing finger at the heavily leaded print across the entire seven columns of the first page. "Clayton to answer State's Atty. Blount's sensational charges." "And this!" He indicated a boxed item, printed in black-faced type, at the top of the story. "Cong. Clay-

ton was notified by long distance telephone, late last night, of the serious charges which had been publicly made against him by his rival for the Republican nomination, during an evening rally held in the Opera House. He stated that he would take the first possible train for home, and answer them in the same place and at the same hour, to-morrow night. Despite the excessive heat, the Congressman has been in Washington for several days, on matters of vital importance to the District."

"Well, at least we succeeded in getting back on tew the front page, even if we've had tew share it with the enemy, John. That's something. And by this time you should have learned tew expect bias on the part of the Press."

"I dew — editorially. That's part of the game. But giving an editorial slant tew straight news, isn't. And they've done it all through."

"They printed what I said, anyhaow, and it'll be read and copied. I've got the message across, in spite of 'em, which is all I wanted. The seed is planted. Naow the only question is, what kind of fruit will it produce — if Clayton doesn't succeed in digging it all up again, and smoothing over the furrows? Come, eat your breakfast. It's time we were hitting the trail."

"I was beginning tew think that you never were coming, Abe," cried Fay, as he met the State's Attorney in the entrance hall outside their office, the next morning.

"I stopped on the way tew interview one of the men in durance vile daown at the jail. He's turned State's evidence, and — what's up, John?" Abe had become aware that his assistant was pale and almost trembling with nervous excitement.

"What's up? Look at that!"

He pointed into the office, and his chief stopped short on the threshold, drove his hands deep into his trousers pockets, and gave a long, low whistle. The door of the small, old-fashioned safe, which stood in the corner behind his desk, had been blown up by some explosive, and the floor in front of it was strewn with papers and documents. Suddenly his expression changed from shocked surprise to growing consternation, and a second later he was on his knees before the safe, hastily picking up and examining the scattered papers.

"What dew you suppose —?"

"'Suppose?' I know! It's that Fugate affidavit
— and they've got it."

"No! You mean Clayton's gang?"

"I don't guess so. Perhaps some one employed by the Rum Ring—of course they know, well enough, who my A, B, C and D were; or more likely the bootleggers who spilled the beans in the first place. Oh, what a fool, what an idiot I was tew leave it hyar! I was so plumb tuckered aout, last night, that my whatpasses-for-a-brain was saound asleep. Like enough they were aoutside and watched me put it in hyar. Any half-wit might have known that they—"

"But supposing they have stolen it, what good'll it

dew them? We can get another one."

"That's not the point. I kept everything, except the charge against Clayton, indefinite, on purpose, figuring that he wouldn't dare tew call my hand by demanding that I publish the affidavit with all those names in it, and so prove that it wasn't a fake. You see, I was baound tew keep Desty Fugate's name aout of the case — at least until after the primaries next Saturday when I could look aout for him — for two reasons.

I didn't want the bootleggers tew know who had given the information; it might have been any one of at least a score of moonshiners in these maountains, probably; and, besides, he's my own uncle, and, if Clayton should learn that fact, he would naturally insist that it was a family frame-up; fraudulent on the face of it."

"But I don't see haow possession of it is going tew help him," broke in Fay. "He can't publish the fact that Fugate made the affidavit, withaout it being a confession that he was accessory, at least after the fact, tew stealing it. And the Lord knows that there's evidence enough, hyar, to substantiate your statement that it has been stolen."

"You're wrong there, John. They can put up a holler that I never did have it, and that this is another frame-up tew get rid of a purely imaginary document—naow that they know I can't produce it. Blowing the safe would be an obvious way of lending verisimilitude tew a statement that it had been stolen, you see. We've got tew tell the truth, of course, if they make the challenge, but it won't help a bit."

"But there's Fugate."

"Yes, there's Desty." Abe broke off abruptly, and his face grew strained. "There's Desty—unless—I wonder if they'd dare go that far? John, we've got tew get tew him, at once. And it's up tew you; I've got that case on the docket this morning, and can't get away."

"Good Lord, you don't really think that Malley and

the others would dew that!"

"Don't know, but we can't take a single chance. The bootleggers wouldn't hesitate a minute tew put a rifle ball intew a 'squealer,' and that's what Desty is, from their standpoint. If they're frightened enough tew go in for safe-breaking and burglary, they wouldn't

stop at murder. And, if the men higher up are at the bottom of this, well, education and position doesn't prevent crime. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, still, from top tew bottom of the scale, and it's a safe bet that they know of plenty of gunmen, belonging tew their fraternity, who'd be glad enough tew make a little extra on the side, and get a chance tew blackmail their superiors, as well. We've got tew get a new affidavit from Desty, and then get him aout of the way, P.D.Q., for a while, anyhow. I wish tew heaven he'd never made it at all! Hyar —" Abe threw himself into his desk chair and hastily wrote a check payable to bearer. "Get this cashed at the bank, on your way, and give the money tew him. Tell him that he's plumb got tew go, for my sake as well as his own safety. If that doesn't work — I know his breed; they don't scare worth a whoop, and Preacher Billy's got his primitive soul all stirred up tew making atonement for his past sins, as well — tell him that unless he does clear aout and stay aout of sight until I can decide what tew dew, I'll have him arrested and jailed. He'd be safe in the jug. Poor old Desty! He's let himself in for more trouble anyhaow, sooner or later, by making that confession."

"I get you, Chief. I'm off."

Fay's answer was not precisely that of a subordinate, but it sufficed. Once again he started for the door on the run, and came into violent collision there with Billy, just entering.

"Billy! I believe you were sent by the gods; the very man I need," welcomed Abe as he recognized his startled and somewhat breathless visitor, for the impact of Fay's charge had been no gentle one.

"Mebbe by the Lord, but I sarve only one God," retorted the preacher, sternly. Then his expression

and voice softened. "I'm right glad tew see you, Abe, and ef I kin holp you, I'd plumb love tew dew hit; reckon you knows thet. Is something discommodin' you? You look —"

His eyes fell upon the wrecked safe and disordered papers about it, and he stopped and stiffened slightly.

His friend explained what had happened, briefly but comprehensively, and concluded by saying, "The first thing is tew get a duplicate affidavit from Desty. You got the other one and can dew it better than could John, hyar. Desty may not remember him and be suspicious of a 'furriner.' Then tell Desty-"

"Why, ain't he hyar?"

"Desty Fugate? No. What made you think —?"

"Hit's this a-way. I war comin' daown tew see you abaout that affydavy thing especial, this morning. I hain't seed the newspapers, and I war comin' tew tell you thet ef you warn't a-goin' tew spring hit, I war a-fixin' tew, myself. Hit hain't the Lord's will thet thet scribe an' Pharisee, Clayton -"

"I know," broke in Abe, impatiently. "It's sprung with a vengeance. And the consequences may be a whole lot different than we expected unless we can get another and ship Desty aout of harm's way. What abaout him, Billy? What made you ask if he wasn't

hyar?"

CHAPTER VI

THE PRIMARY ELECTION

ABE BLOUNT'S unnatural excitement, showing through his bearing and words alike, had at last begun to affect the mountain preacher as well, and the realization that it was somehow associated with the whereabouts of Desty Fugate had commenced to penetrate his slow-working brain and fill it with vague forebodings. Billy's lean face started to work as it always did when the frenzy of exhortation was about to seize him at a Preaching; his voice was pitched in a nervously high key, as he answered the last question.

"Why? Kaise I thought tew find him hyar. Hit's this-a way. I drapped off at his place on my way daown, tew tell him I war a-comin' and what fer, and Phronie, she said thet he'd started fer Fayville, hisself, nigh ontew an haour before — thet you'd sent fer him."

"That I had?"

"Thet's what she said. She said thet a man hed cum up thar with a writin' from you tew Desty, askin' him tew cum daown hyar abaout thet thar affydavy uv his'n. Of course Desty, he couldn't read hit, but the furriner read hit fer him. Hain't hit a fact thet you sent fer —?"

"A fact! No. It's a lie, and — I'm terribly afraid — What did the stranger look like? Did Aunt Phronie say, Billy?"

"She didn't see him. Desty hed started for his corn patch, kind uv early, she said, and cum back after a piece sayin' thet he'd met up with a man who'd give him thet message from you. He saddled up and left, right smart. Abe, you hain't supposin'—?"

"No. I'm — sure. My God!"

The State's Attorney dropped back into the chair from which he had risen to greet the newcomer, and for an instant bent his head and covered his face with his hands. When he lifted it again it was gray and drawn; his fists clenched until the bony knuckles showed through the skin as through white parchment. He finally spoke, and his voice was hollow and rasping.

"There may be a chance tew save him yet, Billy—John. You two go together. Ride up the trail, stop at every cabin, ask every one you can find, especially the children, if they saw any furriners early this morning, and get a description of them. As I figure it aout, there must have been at least two, for Desty certainly didn't recognize the man who gave him the faked message. So there was probably another who knew him and pointed him aout, but kept hidden himself. Then get Bad Bill Cress; he's a deputy sheriff and a good man-hunter. Have him collect a posse and start a search, quick."

"Then you think that it was the bootleggers, Abe?" Fay's voice trembled a little from excitement and

misgiving as he asked the question.

"Almost certain of it, naow. Everything's played right intew their hands and they've been damnably clever, too. But I'm tew blame; the whole thing's my fault. If what I'm afraid of has happened, Desty Fugate's blood is on my head, as much as though I'd shot him myself the night that I cut up his still."

Abe Blount was not the type to make wild, melodramatic statements; but he was worn out, every nerve was on edge, closer to the snapping point than ever before in his life; and his heart was wrung with anguished anticipations. He sagged, physically, as well, and sat bowed over, while every few seconds a visible tremor passed through his huge body.

"I feel like quitting the political fight, to-day -

naow," he added.

"Don't you feel like thet, Abe."

The preacher stepped quickly to his side and laid an awkwardly comforting arm across his friend's bowed shoulders. "I don't believe anything's happened tew Desty; you're jest imaginin' things. But ef what you're afeered uv air so, he air a victim uv the forces uv Iniquity; he's give his life fer the Cause. He war willin' tew; he felt jest thet-a way abaout hit, Abe. He said so. And hit's up tew you tew keep on fightin' agin 'em."

"That's right! You've got tew carry on."

John Fay ranged himself on the other side of his chief, and pressed the hand which lay limp on his knee. He was eager to be off on the exciting errand, but could not leave his friend in such a condition of mind.

Abe pulled himself together with an effort, and even forced a wan smile.

"Yes. Of course we're going tew carry on; but I sure wish it were over. I'm beginning tew feel like the woman who had had a bedridden husband on her hands for months, and one morning said tew the doctor, 'I dew wish tew goodness that Henry'd git well — or something.' But you see where this leaves us, don't you, if anything has happened tew Desty? We're hanging aout at the end of a limb, with no tree attached tew it; we're impaled on both horns of a perfect dilemma! It's devilish, the way this is working aout. The affidavit's gone; it looks horribly as though the man who made it is gone, too; and the only testi-

mony that there is, so far at least, implicates me in his disappearance. Directly, or indirectly, the opposition is sure tew learn this, and that they are safe in challenging me tew produce one or the other, because whoever did this job are just as anxious as the machine is tew see me removed from public life — I might as well have left aout the word 'public,' for I've had more than one anonymous letter tew that effect. The only ones left who actually saw Desty's confession are you two and the folks at Smiling Pass — all my closest friends and most ardent supporters. Did any one else know abaout it, Billy?"

"Judd Amos, he tuck Desty's oath, but he didn't read the paper. The only other one thet knew abaout

hit was Noey."

"Noey Fugate!"

"Thet's right. He war hoppin' mad abaout hit, too. Told his paw thet he war crazy tew make hit. They hed an awful quarrel, but Desty seen his duty an' done hit, even though his boy allaowed thet he'd never speak tew him again. Noey cum and threatened me, too, and he said—"

Billy stopped in evident dismay.

"Go on!" commanded Abe.

"Well, he war plumb aout uv his mind with anger, and he said thet if any harm cum tew his paw through

your usin' thet writin', he'd — he'd —"

"Never mind the rest, Billy. I can guess; and I don't blame him, much. What a fool I've been. Well, the milk's spilt, and I've got tew forget it, if I can—only I can't—and go on waging a political campaign and trying criminal cases. It's past time I was in court, naow—and you two on the trail."

That night Abe Blount did not retire until long after

twelve, and his eyes had not closed when the first gray light of approaching dawn served as an excuse for him to get up, dress and seek the open air. For many restless companions had shared his bed with him, and made sleep impossible. Over and over again he had visioned the event which had almost certainly underlain the meager report that Fay had made, on returning home that evening. Billy and he had found Desty Fugate, his neck broken, lying dead in a deep gully beside a horse with two broken legs. Well Abe knew the spot, a wild and lonesome place with no human habitations within half a mile of it in either direction. There the narrow road, hardly wide enough for a broad-bodied jolt wagon to pass, unless its wheels were securely held in the deep ruts, climbed up from the creek valley and wound around a wooded spur of the mountain on a natural shelf. From its outer, unprotected, edge there was an almost sheer drop of a hundred feet to the bowlder-filled bed of the stream, now burnt by the midsummer sun to little more than a trickle.

It had been so simple, and was so plain. One murderer had hastened ahead, and concealed himself in the bushes on the farther side of the bend. The other, riding with Desty, had naturally dropped a short distance behind, leaving the victim, unsuspecting, to round the curve first. A shout; a stone flung, or a blow from a heavy stick. The startled horse had swerved — was over the edge. The murderers, having satisfied themselves that their work was accomplished, had ridden away, leaving nothing to indicate that there had been foul play. Any coroner's jury in the land would necessarily bring in a verdict of accidental death. There were no physical clews of an assault. The hard-baked roadbed, filled with hoofprints, would yield no evi-

dence. True, strangers had been seen passing along the road, coming and going; but no one had taken any particular notice of them; "furriners" had ceased to be a novelty since the establishment of Smiling Pass, the door through which civilization was slowly entering those mountain fastnesses. It had been murder, Abe had felt certain of that; but "by person or persons unknown," and probably ever to remain unknown. That had been a thought black enough, in all conscience; but a blacker one had been bred of it in the dark hours of the sleepless night. He felt that he had inadvertently placed the weapon in the assassin's hands and pointed out the victim to them.

Another tragic vision had dwelt with him - Aunt Phronie, widowed and broken-hearted, for, although, since Desty had stopped moonshining, he had eaten more than he had earned, he had been her mate. And she had loved him in her pathetic, silent way. Of course he would make such reparation as he could, by assisting in the support of the family; but that would not bring Desty back to her. Then there had been distressed thoughts of Noah. Abe had never felt physical fear, even in the midnight hours; yet Noah was to be both sympathized and reckoned with. The boy had already twice threatened to "get" him; now fresh fuel would be added to the flames of his bitter hatred and, as though all these things were not enough, jealousy, none the less real for being without foundation, had filled his mind with unreasoning, revengeful hostility.

Poor Omie! Abe knew that she, too, would be passing a night of sleeplessness and suffering on his account, bearing his new burden in her young heart. What a loyal little friend she was! John Fay had seen her; had told him how white she had grown when the

tragic news had been disclosed, how terribly she had felt over it, on account of the Fugates, but even more on account of him. What was it that the younger man had added, in a swiftly altered voice? "Why, she's a beauty; abaout the sweetest thing I ever laid eyes on, Abe. And you'd almost swear that she had been raised and educated in the city. Why haven't I known her before? You bet I'm going up there again . . . under different circumstances."

At this recollection Abe had caught himself unconsciously uttering an audible breath not far removed from a groan. But, he asked himself the next instant, why should not Fay visit the girl, fall in love with her, marry her? Why should he be trying to banish the thought as something irritating, hostile to his own happiness? John was young, manly, good-looking, able, clean and loyal-hearted — there was no stigma on his name. If Omie should learn to love him, he would make her as good a husband as woman could wish. He ought to hope for such a consummation; they were both so friendly and loyal to him! Why, then, should he feel as he did about it. She was his chum, nothing more; nor could she ever be anything more, even if his present love for her should, unexpectedly, be fanned by the wind which they had discussed and changed from Platonic glow to passionate flame. If that ever should happen, the flame would have to burn inwardly, even if it consumed him. He would never marry Omie, or any other woman. Mating was not for him. Yet, the negation had brought in its train a new and unaccustomed longing for the very thing which, in the abstract, he had denied himself, forever. In an hour of trial to the soul, such as the present one, how much a woman's boundless love might mean to a man; how comforting the embrace of a wife might be?

Tossing restlessly upon his bed, he had tried to quiet himself by imagining how it would feel to have a wife's warm, tender arms about him, soothing and strengthening, and he had been startled, even shocked, upon realizing that memory had harked back, and that he was actually endeavoring to recall the sensation of real arms which held him close, a real body - slim, vital, clinging — pressed against his own — Omie, as she had clung to him on the night of the tempest. He had put the thought deliberately from his mind, although not without an effort, and become impersonal again. Even though he had felt no impassioned desire for a mate, the persistent longing for children, especially for a son, had become acute. It had been the child, rather than the woman, in Omie which had first attracted him to her, for his love for children came from the very core of his heart. And that poignant longing he knew could never be gratified. Fate had set him apart from these blessings; predestined him for a life alone. Well, such a life might have its compensations, although at the moment it was difficult to see wherein they lay.

But now morning had come. To be sure, the sunshine did not make the fact of Desty's tragic death look any brighter; but it was a shade less personally grim, and the black fancies had fled. The world was a workaday world again; there were tasks to be performed, and there is no better palliative for the troubled heart and worried mind than hard work. Abe had fully regained control of his will-power, which had been badly shaken for a time. The recollection of the tragic event of yesterday still rankled deeply in his heart; but his courage and determination had flowed back and he was ready, with accustomed equanimity, to face whatever the immediate future might hold in store for him. This

was fortunate, for the tide of fortune, on the flow of which he had for a time traveled fast and far, had not reached its full ebb even yet; he had not yet reached the bottom of the trough which followed the wave of

popularity.

The mid-morning train brought the daily papers from Culverton City, and Abe and his assistant read them together, during the noon recess in the case which they were trying. No mention appeared of the theft of the affidavit or its maker's death. The report had not yet been given to the public, for, although Abe had already set detectives to work in an apparently hopeless endeavor to trace the men who had committed the double crime, he had decided that there was nothing to be gained by giving out the story. Politically, it would be better to wait a day and see how the cat was going to jump.

But other news affecting him there was, with a vengeance. It fairly shrieked from the front page of the newspaper, and its echo sounded from the editorial sheet. Clayton had made his promised reply, and it was all that Abe had anticipated — and infinitely more! According to the enthusiastic editorial comment upon it, Honorable H. Clay Clayton had risen to the greatest heights of eloquence of his whole distinguished career; it was a complete and stirring vindication. Even in cold black and white, the speech, printed in full, furnished a basis for such a conclusion, as Abe was forced to admit to himself. The expected sweeping denial of every charge which had been falsely made against him was there. The incensed demand for a full retraction, or the publication of the libelous document, together with the production of the man who had signed it, was there. The challenge to the authenticity of the affidavit was there. The statement that the speaker's lawyers would, as soon as possible, enter suit against the State's Attorney for defamation of character and malicious slander was there. But that was only part. Clayton had eloquently spread his public record and his private life before his auditors, and challenged any honest man to find a flaw in either. He had declared, passionately, that never, prior to the unlicensed and licentious attack, made by his opponent, had the suggestion of a slur been cast upon them. It was a stirring appeal for justice. Abe knew that it was predicated upon falsehood, that it was counterfeit coin, yet it seemed to ring true and he realized that it could not have but carried conviction. Whether the statements were fair or false, they had obviously come from a man who was stirred as he had never been stirred in his life, and they were strong. He had spoken wholly without notes, and with such fire and fervor that the audience had gone wild, the paper said. He had not even touched on politics or the campaign; there had been no need. The speech carried its own implication, and was all the stronger because of the omission.

When the two had read it from start to finish, John

Fay was raging, and Abe was very sober.

The mid-afternoon train — second, and last for the day, into Fayville - brought not one, but half a dozen reporters, some of them from points as far distant as the Capital City of the state. They descended upon the office of the State's Attorney like a well-trained, but excited, pack of bloodhounds that had run their quarry to earth. They yelped out question after question. Had he a statement? What answer was he going to make? Where was the affidavit? Who executed it?

Abe knew some of them personally. He understood and liked newspaper men, as a class, and welcomed them all with quiet, unassumed friendliness. The cigar box was brought out, and when each had found a seat, on the two extra chairs, the corners of the desk, the window sills, and the air was beginning to turn blue with tobacco smoke, he leaned back and addressed them in ordinary tones.

"Boys, you're not going tew get just the story that you came for — I wish tew heaven you were! But what you dew get will be straight goods, and it will be news, although I don't expect to see it in print; at least, not in the form that I'm going tew give it to you, and probably not in the form that some of you'll write it. All the same I've always played fair with you fellows, and 'come across' when I could; you know that. And I'm going tew give you facts! I've always had some little reputation for honesty in the past - not that that's anything tew be praoud of, although its antithesis would be something tew be ashamed of — and I still want tew be classed with 'Honest Abe' in this one respect. I believe — I know — that every word I said abaout Clayton is true. And naow I can't back up a single one of them."

Whistles and exclamations of surprise broke in on him, and the rapid-fire questioning was renewed. He waited until they had spent themselves, and continued, calmly, telling the whole story without reservation.

He concluded by saying, "That's the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, boys; but I know as well as any of you dew haow easily it can be twisted aout of shape, and the facts given an utterly different implication. What's more, I expect it tew happen. Orders are orders; and politics, politics."

"You're right, Abe; worse luck. But, whatever happens, you can caount on at least one vote from yours truly," cried one of his inquisitors, and five oth-

ers said, "The same hyar!" somebody adding, "Let's make aour motto, 'Vote early and often."

Abe smiled, wearily.

"That's mighty good, and encouraging, of you, and I can dew with a bit of encouragement, to-day. God knows I don't want tew set up a haowl—I'm not licked, yet; but I can't help feeling a good deal as though Fate had got me temporarily backed intew a corner and has been handing me some pretty stiff right and left jolts the last few days. Oh, well, it's all part of the game, I reckon, even if the rules are a bit blind tew us poor mortals." His grin took the "preaching" out of the words. "If you-all are going tew make the last train out of this magnificent metropolis, you'll have tew be stretching your legs right smart."

"That (highly adjectived) re-write editor could make white look black, green, pink, or any other color, tew suit the taste of the Paowers that Be!" disgustedly announced one of the six the next morning, as he read, not what he had written, but what was printed in his paper concerning the stolen affidavit. And the other five might, with propriety, have said, "Amen." The story was there, but so was the plain hint that under the circumstances it was, to put it mildly, a most amazing one.

On the afternoon when Abe Blount had first announced his candidacy to his friends at Smiling Pass, Omie had begged for and received laughing permission to come to his office in Fayville on the day of the Primary Election, so that she might get the returns and hear the news of his victory as soon as he did himself. She had not forgotten the plan, and, although, when she broached the matter to Virgil, he had tried to dissuade

her from carrying it out, she had once more silenced his objections, protesting with a subdued little laugh, "Oh, Virge, that's what you said the day that I wanted tew go daown there and hear Abe try his first case as State's Attorney — against poor Desty Fugate." Her voice caught, momentarily. "But you took me, like a dear, and everything came aout all right. He won, then, and he's going to win, to-morrow. You might as well agree tew take me, if you want any peace of mind, for I'm going, whether you dew or not."

For some weeks it had been a much changed and strangely quiet Omie, but here was a flash of her old-time, determined spirit, and Virgil yielded again.

Abe had wholly forgotten about the arrangement, and his surprise was as great as his pleasure when the brother and sister rode up towards noon on election day. He and John Fay simultaneously caught sight of them through the office window, and simultaneously sprang to their feet to go and meet them; but the latter was nearer the door and won the race. His muscular arms reached up and half lifted, half swung the girl from the saddle, and a quick pain stabbed through the older man's heart. Omie, flushed and smiling, in the arms of another! It was only for the barest moment; but the picture disturbed him more than he would have thought was possible, even though he told himself that it was not jealousy. That would be too absurd. The next instant the faint shadow had passed to Fay's boyish countenance, and it grew somewhat deeper as he observed how eagerly Abe caught the girl's two hands in his, and how long he held them, while the color mounted more richly to her temples.

"Oh, Abe. Quick. Tell me haow the election's going!" she cried.

"Haven't the gift of second sight, like Aunt Lissy,

so I can't. The polls don't close until four o'clock, and of course no returns have come in yet. I might give a pretty good guess; but — I guess I won't."

"Abe!" She caught hold of his sleeve and her voice was imploring. "You don't really mean that you're

afraid —?"

For the first time in several days the man laughed naturally. The period of nerve-racking struggle and anxious planning was ended, and the outcome was on the laps of the gods. He was relaxing, letting down.

"Afraid? Not a bit of it; especially with you hyar tew keep my spirits up. No, I'm not a afraid; I'm reconciled. For the guess that I wouldn't make, a second ago, is that, unless a miracle happens, I'm in for the finest licking of my career, to-day, and then hurray for private life, as soon as my present term expires, and a home on the maountain-side."

This last suggestion robbed the blow of a little of its force, and the girl's lips smiled, tremulously, although her violet-blue eyes grew luminous with a film

of disappointed tears.

"Oh, of course you're joking," she answered, incred-

ulously.

"Sure. You've commented on that habit of mine, before. But it's 'a true word spoken in jest,' just the same. I'm making light of a serious matter; the loss of the expected 'Honorable' before my distinguished name, a seat in the Haouse of Representatives at Washington — and, incidentally, seventy-five hundred a year, with perquisites. I shall probably never know what those are, naow," he added, with feigned lugubriousness.

"I don't believe that you're going tew lose," she answered, staunchly, and the words and tone alike brought a happy glow to his heart. Then she turned to his assistant and demanded, "He isn't, is he, Mr.

Fay?"

"Not if you say he won't. The Fates couldn't be so hard-hearted as to make you aout in error. Why, I'd be willing tew risk my last cent betting your way, naow."

"Naow!" she echoed, beginning to look bewildered. "Then you were really thinking — Oh, I won't believe it. Please don't lose, Abe! There, that's idiotic and childish." Omie hastily brushed a vagrant tear from her cheek. "Tell me exactly haow things stand."

"All right, I will in as far as I can; it won't be the first time that you've had tew face facts, my child. But 'come intew my parlor,' as the spider said. I've got tew be within reach of the telephone, for John has a newspaper friend in Culverton City who's calling us up with the latest news, abaout every fifteen minutes. Speaking of the devil, there goes the bell, naow."

He led the way back into the office and, after a brief conversation over the wire, turned to them and said, with a grin, "Macey regrets tew report, again. Word is coming in from all the taowns that the biggest primary election vote in history is being cast, which of course means that the machine is well-oiled and working smoothly. Moreover, the cyards are nicely stacked against us, apparently. Every telegraph pole and even the voting booths in Culverton City blossomed aout, overnight, with poster pictures of aour friend Clayton and his campaign banners. One of aour ardent supporters protested against their presence within a hundred feet of a booth — of course that's absolutely contrary tew the corrupt practice act — finally started tew tear them daown, himself, and is naow in the hospital being fixed up with plaster, 'not of Paris, like a fine Italian toy, but the kind the doctor uses when the cuts and bumps and bruises overcome a little regular live boy,' "he chanted, almost gayly. "In another precinct both inspectors are already gloriously drunk, and have chased aour watcher off the field. Aside from that everything's fine."

Fay boiled over.

"The old stuff! It's absolutely illegal, as well as rotten. Well, it'll give you graounds for contesting the

election, anyhaow."

"Yes, if we decide that it's worth while. But, before debating that point, let's wait until the votes are caounted and see haow close the figures are." Turning to Omie and Virgil, he continued, "That's merely a sample. Friends have brought word that the same sort of thing is going on, even in aour own maountain districts. The enemy has got aout-posts stationed at every booth, and most of the men voters are being way-laid with a wink and drink, before they are permitted tew enter and register their unbiased preference for the Congressional candidate. Oh, well. Let's go tew lunch, over at the famous eating haouse which I told you abaout, a year ago. Reckon that I might as well order soft poached eggs on milk toast myself, naow."

During the simple meal that followed, and the whole afternoon, Abe was apparently in the highest of spirits, and joked and told humorous stories so continuously that the others could not be other than merry, superficially, at least. His manner was infectious, even though they sensed the fact that his levity was partly artificial, and partly the result of the inevitable reaction from the strain which he had been undergoing

and his grief over the recent tragedy.

Once Omie found herself rebelling against it, even a little shocked, and she remonstrated with him in a low-

voiced aside. "Oh, Abe, haow can you joke like that, when everything seems tew be going as wrong as possible?"

Serious, and almost tender for the moment, he pressed the hand which she had laid protestingly on his knee, as he answered softly, "Have you forgotten? 'Es fer Trouble, you won't mind hit half so much ef you jest SMILE.'"

Suddenly understanding, she returned the pressure, and beamed at him through a mist of tears.

About mid-afternoon a mountaineer brought in the report from the first precinct where every registered vote had been cast and counted — one of their own apparent strongholds. The messenger also had a tale to tell about free moonshine and freer propaganda which had there been dissipated against the destroyer of stills and prosecutor of his own friends and blood relations.

Abe read aloud from the slip the scrawled figures, "Blount, 13, Clayton, 23," and laughed, although this time not quite naturally.

"The numbers are prophetic, children," he said. "And they both apply tew yours truly, in this case. Even 'mine own familiar friends' have turned against me. As Horatio remarked at the close of the play, 'Good night, sweet Prince'—that's me—'and flights of angels sing you tew your rest.' Will you be a flight of angels, to-night, Omie, and sing me tew sleep?"

"Oh, Abe, will you come home with us?"

"I'm thinking some of it; I'd like tew get away and sleep for a week."

"Dew. At least dew come. I want you tew. Of course we could put you up, but perhaps you'd rather stay in your own new home. Yes, it's really finished, and I had Virge put a cot bed in it, and I — the girls

have woven a 'kivverlid' so that it would be ready in case you should come up unexpectedly, some time."

Eagerness for the moment conquered the bitter disappointment in the girl's heart and voice, and John Fay looked glum again.

"Why, Omie. That saounds almost tew good tew

be true. You bet I'll come."

Six hours had passed. Once more the man and girl were for a moment alone on the veranda at Smiling Pass, leaning against the railing in the warm darkness, for the new moon was not due until the morrow. There was no breeze, and the night stillness was complete, save for the faintest murmur from the diminished creek, and the ceaseless sounds of the insect myriads. They had left Fayville before the final reports were all in; but even Omie, who had hoped against hope until the end, had been convinced that Abe had been defeated by at least two to one.

Now the pendulum had swung back again, bringing another reaction. Even the man had fallen silent, and both were heavy-hearted with disappointment. Their hopes, a few short weeks before so buoyant, had been

beaten down and crushed to bits.

For some moments neither had spoken. Then the girl drew a deep quivering breath and, on impulse, Abe reached out his hand, both to give and find comfort by clasping hers. He touched her cool, bare arm, in the darkness, and slid his hand caressingly downward, seeking her fingers. His hand closed upon them, and the girl started. It might have meant nothing—or everything, and she was suddenly in a panic. The feminine instinct to postpone surrender—to flee—set her heart to throbbing painfully. She was afraid; of him; of herself.

"Oh, don't!" she cried, snatching her hand away and pressing it to her breast.

The next instant memory played one of its queer tricks, and there rushed to her mind the morning of their first meeting, and her own vexed thought, "He's just been making fun of me, but I'll get even with him, some day. I'll make him suffer." Somehow she knew that he was hurt, was suffering, now, and she was to blame. Her heart burned with bitter remorse, but still she could not force herself to retract the word and action, for that might call for explanation. And an instant later the opportunity to do so was gone. Virgil had joined them. That night Omie slept none at all, and her pillow was wet with tears. Nor did Abe sleep much better, for he had not understood, nor yet read, the message which Omie's "kivverlid" carried woven in its linen threads, fashioned into the true lover's knot pattern.

CHAPTER VII

DESTINY

THE Twelfth Congressional District of the State of Cumberland held a population of something over two hundred thousand, but so many of these were mountain dwellers, and either illiterate or unregistered, that its normal voting strength was less than fifteen per cent. In a regular election the Democratic Party usually mustered about nine thousand votes, the Republican Party some fourteen thousand, and the People's Party a negligible number. In the Primary election the Democrats had no contest and nominated a rather colorless candidate with a vote of 5,092; the People's Independent Party put its full slate in the field, headed by Tom Lemos as candidate for Congress, with a registered count of 4,967; the Republican Party, however, cast the largest vote on record, exceeding that for Governor at the previous election. Clayton polled 10,423 and Blount 4,116, surprise being expressed by the newspapers that the latter vote should have been so large, considering the popularity of his opponent. The Press also commented favorably, the following day, on the sportsmanship shown in defeat by the State's Attorney. The Fourth Estate had done its duty, carried out orders and accomplished its end, and now saw no reason for going further and "rubbing it in." Anglo Saxons love a good loser, and Abe Blount had proved himself to be such.

When he had gone to Smiling Pass he had fully intended to remain there over Sunday, at least; but he changed his mind during the restless night and returned

to Fayville early the next morning. From his office he had telephoned his brief statement to Macey in Culverton City, who cheerfully agreed to give it out to the

other papers.

"The Republicans of this District have spoken," said Abe. "And in a voice sufficiently laoud so that I had no difficulty in hearing their verdict. The American way is to bow to the will of the majority, and I believe that Party principles still transcend personal variances. I shall not only vote the straight ticket in November, and urge all of my loyal friends tew dew the same, but shall continue tew work for the Party, especially in the maountain regions where my appeal may carry the most weight and where it is most needed."

He went on to reiterate his oft-made statement that the anarchistic party held a grave menace, and pointed out that the four thousand votes cast by it in the primaries, far from indicating weakness, showed surprising strength. That Lemos could already have lined up and registered so many held a serious threat. He had three months more in which to build on this substantial foundation, and, unless the danger were made clear, many voters might desert the older parties, under the urge of political unrest, and rally to the banners of the new one as a protest. In the regular election, where the ballot was secret, they would not have to state their party affiliations, as they had in the primaries.

For a while politics passed from the front page of the newspapers. The voters, always quick to forget what happened during the heat of the campaign, and more concerned for the time with their own private affairs, went on their customary ways, and few so much as recalled Congressman Clayton's threat to bring suit for slander againt his erstwhile opponent, or commented on the fact that it had not been entered. Indeed, it never was. Under all the circumstances Abe was not likely to challenge Clayton to proceed with it, even though he realized that the other's lack of action was probably the result of fear that he might be able, after all, to substantiate the truth of his charges. And the State's Attorney, while chafing under the implication of having broadcast a malicious lie, preferred to suffer the injury in silence rather than do anything which might further weaken the Party at a time which he considered critical. For the moment the issue was Law and Order, rather than machine rule. The mills of the gods grind slowly, and the old conflict with the Malley crowd could be revived and fought to a finish, when the more immediate and menacing threat had been laid. Dago Lemos kept the matter alive in his fiery speeches to miners and mountaineers, to be sure, coining political capital of it and challenging the State's Attorney to make good his charges and prosecute the Republican candidate for Congress, but, needless to say, no word thereof appeared in the Press.

All this Abe had to explain, patiently and painstakingly, to Preacher Billy, who, a week after the primaries, rode down for the express purpose of taking issue

with his position.

"If there is no choice except between two evils, we ought tew choose the lesser," he said. "It isn't that I love Clayton more, but the things for which Lemos and his gang stand for, less. There lies a grave danger, backed by a fast-growing element in this District, and we've got tew defeat it with whatever weapons we have at hand, even weak and perhaps crooked ones. I didn't, myself, realize quite haow petty Clayton is, until yesterday, when it came tew me straight that he

has repeatedly declared that he doesn't want my offered help, and would rather be beaten than elected by my aid. Isn't that childish?"

"By the same token you air a man, Abe Blount," Billy answered. "But this time I kain't agree with you, jest the same. You don't ketch me votin' fer thet

feisty Clayton."

So, without special incident, passed the melting weeks of August, September, with its burning days but more bearable nights, and October, most glorious of months, especially in the mountains. Abe Blount continued to devote himself to the efficient performance of his official duties, and, although there was no beating of drums and blare of trumpets connected with the work, in one or two cases he accomplished the noteworthy in a degree sufficient to gain notice and commendation from the Press, once more. He also kept his word and became a free lance campaigner for the Republican Party and the cause of Law and Order at the coming election, addressing gatherings of his own mountain people wherever he found them, and accepting a few invitations to visit small towns near-by, and speak to church assemblages. And again, wherever he spoke, he made converts to the cause and friends for himself. Even many who had voted against him and, under the influence of Clayton propaganda, felt bitter hostility towards "that political upstart," now forgave, and said to one another, "He was badly advised. It was a great mistake for him tew run against such a splendid man as Congressman Clayton; but then, we all make mistakes. Tew err is human, you know."

Yet, exceedingly busy as he was, he found time frequently to visit Smiling Pass and enjoy a few hours of rest and relaxation in his own little cottage, which he

had furnished sparely, but with enough for his simple needs. The spot had already grown into his affections as really "home"; he loved it and the restful, picturesque view up and down the creek that curved around the knoll on which it stood within the pleasant shade of its sycamore tree—a veritable giant. He found a quiet pleasure in Omie's companionship, as well; for the two had tacitly reëstablished their friendship, although on a less intimate basis than before.

Omie was no longer the child of yesterday. She had suffered. She still grieved in secret, but she now felt intuitively, that the great love which she bore for Abe Blount was not reciprocated; it was a hopeless passion and must be carefully concealed from him and the world; but the pain of it was tempered by the very joy of loving. The lesson which she was learning in conquering impulse was a bitter one; but it was daily strengthening her moral fibre. Some of the fresh bloom of youth had vanished from her cheeks, and her expression had become less merry and childlike, and was often almost pathetic, despite herself, but something—a new depth of character—had been added, especially in her wonderful eyes.

Abe recognized the change in her, although utterly ignorant of the reason for it, and, while he missed the old frank camaraderie, he appreciated the new depth. They were the best of friends. They talked and read and jested together; but they never touched hands. The memory of that one unhappy evening was reared like a tangible wall between them.

On one of his brief week-end trips to Smiling Pass, late in October, Abe found the girl more like her old self than he had seen her for many weeks. She greeted him with shining eyes and eager enthusiasm, crying, "Oh, Abe. What dew you think?"

"I don't," he interrupted, promptly. "I'm on a two

days' vacation."

"Well, at least you might listen. 'Smiles,' Donald and little Junie are coming hyar next week. They're in Washington, and of course couldn't go home without running up tew see haow the work which they fathered and mothered is getting along. Please promise that you'll come up! Why, it doesn't seem possible that you've never even seen aour 'Smiles.'"

"'Come'? You bet I will. Just send me word when

"'Come'? You bet I will. Just send me word when they arrive, and I'll come a-kiting. My education won't be complete until I've met the famous Mrs.

'Smiles' McDonald."

"Naow you're joking, again," she pouted. "But I don't care. It's another true word spoken in jest. Wait and see if I'm not right."

Some weeks prior to this the fire had been rekindled beneath the political pot and the stew was simmering again. Congressman Clayton had been called back into the limelight to wage an active campaign, primarily against the Democratic candidate for his seat, since all signs pointed to a strongly democratic year, and, even in a nominally Republican District, it was safe to take nothing for granted. He personally refused to consider seriously the anarchistic, People's Independent Party bugaboo, as he termed it, chiefly because Abe Blount had been responsible for directing public attention to it; but other, and more far-seeing politicians, had sometime since begun to be disturbed over the activities of "Dago" Lemos, and realized that the threat from that quarter was not to be lightly dismissed. The number of new voters who were daily being registered in the mine and mountain localities furnished them food for thought, and the crowd of sensation-seekers that flocked to hear the fiery orator, when he actually invaded Culverton City itself, gave them further pause.

The result of all this was that Clayton's managers insisted that he do something which he had not been called upon to do for many years; to make an intensive swing about the circle during the final week of the campaign, speaking at least twice daily. Moreover, they had decided that even the mountain regions must not be slighted, and had scheduled a widely advertised rally for the evening of the second of November at the schoolhouse at Bears Mouth Creek, a location which was fairly central and accessible to a large number of voters who lived in scattered cabins between Fayville and Smiling Pass, on Rattlesnake, Fox Trot and other tributary streams. Jonathan's Jonathan, Justice of the Peace and leading local man of affairs, was to dine and introduce the candidate.

After some hesitation, Abe Blount had decided to attend this rally, thereby setting the example and giving evidence of the sincerity of his pledge that, for the time being, the Party took precedence over personal antipathies.

He arrived rather late, to find the schoolhouse jammed to the door and many waiting on the outside. These set up a cheer and greeted him with good-natured raillery, when they saw his tall form through the deepening dusk, and, hearing the name of his late rival, Clayton, inside the building, broke suddenly off in the middle of a sentence addressed to the presiding officer, flushed and bit his lip with annoyance. Abe succeeded in worming his way into the crowded room and down the side aisle towards the platform, intending to offer his hand to the candidate, but the latter observed his approach and so pointedly turned his back on him that

the State's Attorney checked his slow progress

abruptly.

His eyes then caught sight of one woman upon the stage — Marion Clayton, dressed in a stylish riding habit with divided skirt, which had earlier caused considerable adverse comment from the womenfolk of Bears Mouth Creek, when she had first appeared in it, riding astride. In imitation of her father she pointedly ignored the slight bow which he made her, averting her eyes; but, whereas the Congressman's flushed countenance had turned a deeper hue, her beautiful face grew a little pale. Both chagrined and angry at this studied rebuff, Abe retraced his steps and took up a position leaning against the wall at the rear of the room.

Following Jonathan's fairly creditable introduction — creditable considering the fact that he had been far from abstemious during dinner — Clayton stepped to the edge of the platform and stood, handsome and distinguished in appearance and faultlessly dressed, facing his strange, roughly clad audience. He graciously acknowledged the rather uncertain applause, started by his late rival, and began to speak, at first in a rather perfunctory manner. But, under the spell of his own voice, the veteran politician soon warmed up to the type of flowery eloquence for which he was famous. His voice took on an impassioned depth and his face grew still more flushed from the blood set coursing by the physical exertion of his gesturings.

Suddenly there came a break in the middle of a rhetorical sentence. An expression of momentary agony appeared on his countenance, he pressed his hand to his rotund waist and then passed it over his moist brow. Smiling, a trifle weakly, he excused himself with the words, "Just a touch of indigestion, I reckon.

Friend Jonathan's dinner was too baountiful. As I was saying . . ."

Came again the look of exquisite anguish on his face, from which the color was being swiftly drained. He swayed dizzily, and clutched at the corner of the desk for support. Then a sharp cry broke from his lips,

and he collapsed on the platform, unconscious.

Like an echo to his cry came a terrified scream from Marion Clayton, who was the first to start from her seat and rush to the side of the prostrate man. As she dropped to her knees there, a tumult of excited, startled and pitying exclamations burst forth all over the room, and there was a general crowding forward; but Abe's great height and strength enabled him to force his way through the human pack until he stood before the frightened group on the stage, where he extended his arms as a barrier to the crowd and verbally urged them to give back and let the sick man have more air. There was something about him which commanded obedience, even in an excited, curious crowd, and a moment later he was kneeling beside the girl, over the body of her father and his late antagonist.

"Hand me the water pitcher, Jonathan," he said.

"Oh! Oh! What is it? What is the matter with him? — Daddy! Daddy! Can't some one dew something? Abe. Oh, Abe, can't you help him?" implored the girl, wildly, as she clutched his arm with both her trembling hands. Unlike her mountain sisters, Marion had not been schooled to self-control in the face of tragedy or sudden crises.

"I'll dew all I can, Marion. Naow, just try tew keep cool, and help. Let me have your handkerchief." He took the little square of fine linen and lace which the girl had been wringing in her anguish, dipped it in the water and wiped the cold perspiration from the deathly

white face of the unconscious man, and the flecks of blood from his drawn lips. "I've no idea what's wrong — of course it may be nothing serious — I sure hope it isn't. But we'd best get him tew a doctor as quick as we can."

"But haow? Haow can we?" she wailed. "It's miles even tew Fayville, and he'll die. He'll die!"

"I know just what tew dew," declared Abe, with sudden inspiration. "We'll take him up tew Smiling Pass. Dr. McDonald and his wife have just arrived, and the place and their presence there is nothing less than a Godsend. Jonathan, you hitch up your jolt wagon, fill the bottom with hay and plenty of bed quilts, so it'll ride easy, and we'll have him in a real hospital inside of an haour."

His plan, the only feasible one, was put into immediate execution under his cool directing, and, on a message brought ahead by one of Jonathan's boys, the little House of Health was once more made ready for a patient. The lad's excited and decidedly incoherent report left them so much in the dark as to what had really happened that both the physician and his nurse-wife had prepared themselves for a possible operation, and donned hospital vestments which they had left there, a year previous. A city dispensary could hardly have been more in readiness for the reception of a sick man than was this out-of-the-way mountain spot, when the cavalcade finally arrived.

The meeting between Omie's old friends and her new one was far from what she had planned, but it was no less cordial and sincere.

"Mr. Blount? I'm mighty glad to know you," said Donald, without introduction, as the unmistakable form of the State's Attorney mounted the long flight of steps to the veranda, where the group was waiting.

"And I," added Rose, extending her hand to meet the one which her husband was not clasping.

"I reckon that I was never more glad tew meet a particular man, Dr. McDonald. Mrs. 'Smiles,' I had a nice speech all made up for Omie's ideal, but it'll have tew be postponed until some other time. We've all got aour hands full, naow, and we come bringing trouble tew those who banish it."

Nevertheless, Abe's keen glance, sweeping the two faces, had weighed both man and woman, and found them not wanting, for Donald's plain, strong countenance with its crisp iron-gray hair, and look of trained efficiency, inspired confidence, and "Smiles" was all that he had been led to believe. She was now a fully matured woman, although still girlishly slender and graceful, even in her starched white uniform, and her early loveliness had ripened into perfect bloom beneath the sun of her husband's unaltering love, the shadows of strengthening trials, and through the gift of mother-hood.

Now it was Dr. McDonald who took full charge. With few words he directed the four mountaineers where to lay the semi-conscious and softly moaning man, and then said, "I'll ask all of you to remain outside, for a little while. Camille, we'll want you, of course — and bring a basin of hot water. One moment, please, Miss Clayton. Has your father had any attack similar to this one, before?"

"Oh, never. Why, doctor, he's always had perfect health — he's been so well and strong —"

"No illnesses, even minor ones?"

"Nothing. Nothing, that is, except a little indigestion occasionally, after a heavy meal. He's been so well— What can be the trouble, do you suppose?"

"Hmm. I'd rather not 'suppose' until after we've made an examination. But, there, keep up your courage. We won't be long."

With a body-shaking sob Marion Clayton turned, blindly, and was caught in Omie's arms. Her trouble had broken down the barrier of dislike and made the

younger girl a womanly comforter.

"I wish you'd describe to me just what occurred when the Congressman had this attack," said Donald, again addressing the State's Attorney. "The boy who brought the message was scared half out of his wits, and we couldn't make head nor tail of his story."

Abe explained, with an accuracy and freedom from superfluous words which brought a nod of appreciation from his listener. Dr. McDonald entered the hospital and closed the door, leaving, without, darkness and painful uncertainty. He returned in about fifteen minutes, ignored Marion's unspoken appeal other than to tell her that her father was resting comfortably, and drew the State's Attorney a little to one side.

"There's no use in mincing matters," he said. "Congressman Clayton is a mighty sick man. I don't hesitate to say, now, that he has a hemorrhagic ulcer of the stomach, and that there's been a perforation. He's had a profuse loss of blood, and his pulse is extremely weak and thready. I've given him an opiate to quiet the severe paroxysms of pain, but he's very weak."

"Does that mean that he's likely tew die?" de-

manded the other, bluntly.

"Yes. Likely to. If peritonitis sets in, he probably won't last thirty-six hours, and he may not, in any event. On the other hand, there's a possibility of his recovering entirely, although I doubt it."

"But haow is it possible?" Abe's amazement showed

in his tone. "Miss Clayton said that he'd never been sick before—"

"I've known cases of this sort where there wasn't even a sign of illness or distress, previous to the collapse; but the discomfort after eating is a symptom of gastric ulcer. By the way, has he been addicted to the use of alcohol?"

"I'm afraid so."

"That may account for it. The point is a disputed one, but it's dead certain that, if he's been drinking much of the present day stuff, especially moonshine, it might explain the trouble. People don't seem to realize how deadly this raw stuff, full of fusel oil, is. Even if they aren't killed outright, or made blind by it, it's bound to raise the very devil with their stomachs, sooner or later."

Abe's expression, already one of sympathy and deep concern, grew even graver as a new thought entered his mind.

"Dr. McDonald, there's more at stake than one human life, just naow," he said. "But the greater thing depends upon that life." Very briefly he outlined the political situation, and concluded, "If Clayton should die to-night, which God forbid, there might be time for the District Chairman of the Republican party tew annaounce another candidate whose name should be substituted for his own on the ballot, although haow that would work aout, at this stage of the game, is a question. If he lives until after Tuesday, and the news of haow serious his condition is can be kept from the public, I'm naow convinced that he'll be elected, although it's going tew be a close thing. This is the crucial time. If we can beat every man on Lemos's 'red' ticket, naow, that party will crumble, and then, if Clayton dies, a special election for Congressman tew

fill the vacancy can be held withaout much danger from that anarchistic craowd. If he should die Tuesday before the polls close, and yet receive the greatest number of votes, the result would be the same, although there would certainly be a mix-up and perhaps a contest, which would put new life into the opposition; but it'll be even worse if the report that he is dying, and likely tew pass away any moment, gets aout generally. Warnings and instructions what tew dew, printed in the newspapers, wouldn't reach, or have any effect on, hundreds up in these hills and a great many in the taowns, and there's a possibility that enough would fail tew vote for Clayton, thinking that there's no sense in electing a dying man, tew — Good Lord. Through an almost unbelievably mad trick of Fate that fellow Lemos might get himself elected, after all! Doctor, it's up tew you. You've got tew dew everything that's humanly possible tew keep him alive for four days, at least. Oh, I know that you would, anyway, and cure him if it can be done, but you see haow much even prolonging his life may mean under the circumstances."

Donald regarded the speaker with deepened interest, for Omie had told them all about the Primaries, Clayton's hostility and bitterness toward the State's Attorney, and how the latter had refused to retaliate. Rather curiously he answered, "You seem to feel this pretty keenly, Mr. Blount. I thought that Clayton—"

"It isn't the man, although I'm sorry for him, personally, and don't want tew see him die, if it can be helped. But if he dies naow, a cause that I've been fighting for, tooth and nail, will be faced with the possibility of defeat, just when everything seemed tew be all set for victory. It may saound a good deal like mock heroics, but I honestly believe that I'd be willing tew swap places with Clayton this minute, and take

his one chance in a hundred for life, rather than see what Lemos stands for win at this election."

"I honestly believe that you would, Blount," responded Don, quietly. "We haven't much to work with, but I'll do my darnedest, of course. We may be able to prevent peritonitis setting in, although I can't be sure of that; but he's quite as likely to succumb to extreme anemia — the result of losing so much blood. We can't build up his strength by ordinary feeding, that's wholly out of the question. And we haven't the facilities for supplying nourishment artificially. In extreme cases, like this one, transfusion of blood is sometimes resorted to with success —"

"That means blood drawn from another person?"

"Yes, but —"

"There are no 'buts' abaout it, doctor. If that might increase his strength and keep him going, even a little longer, let's dew it. His daughter would certainly agree, even if he isn't in a condition to make the decision himself."

"Well, who —?"

"Good Lord, me, of course! I reckon that I can spare a little blood tew help a cause that I've boasted that I was ready tew die for," answered Abe with a dry laugh. "I've got plenty, and I don't guess that there's anything the matter with either my red or white corpuscles — you see I know the names, although hanged if I know the difference between 'em."

Half an hour later there took place the first operation for the transfusion of blood which had ever been performed in that mountain region. And the men who lay in adjacent beds in the little hospital at Smiling Pass—the one giving, the other unconsciously receiving the vital fluid—were bitter enemies.

CHAPTER VIII

FULFILLMENT

In response to a frantic message sent by Marion Clayton — which had been carried by one of the boys to Fayville and telephoned thence to Culverton City, along with a vague but reassuring statement for the press, framed by Abe — the Clayton family physician, the Chairman of the District Committee and two other men arrived post haste at Smiling Pass, late Friday afternoon, and were immediately led into the room where the Congressman lay, very weak, but clear of mind, and with the edge of the pain dulled by opiates.

Marion had, after her first uncontrolled grief, rallied all her will to meet the emergency, and remained at her father's bedside continuously from the time of the operation, except for two hours in the early morning, when Rose had literally led her, stumbling, away to snatch a little sleep bred of exhaustion. And now she insisted upon remaining during the interview which followed, and clung to her father's cold, moist hand throughout what was to be the hardest ordeal she had ever been called upon to face in all her life.

The new doctor had also suggested that Donald remain, partly as a matter of professional courtesy, partly because he felt like sharing his responsibility with another, especially when that other was a physician so famous as Dr. McDonald of Boston; and Clayton had seconded his request.

The half-hour conference which took place was a most serious one, and, at times, became hotly argumentative, the two doctors frequently calling a temporary

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halt in it when they saw that their patient was becoming too greatly excited. Just what transpired is not a matter of record, for neither the heart-broken girl nor the conferees themselves ever disclosed, and the physicians' lips were sealed by the conventions of their profession; but Smiles overheard its ending, having been sent for by her husband to bring a drink of cool water to the sick man and she later recounted that little to just one person, the State's Attorney, for reasons of her own.

In a very weak voice, Clayton had said, "Maybe you fellows think that this is melodramatic — the stuff you read abaout in fiction. Perhaps it is; but I reckon that both melodrama and story books are faounded on natural human emotions and reactions, after all, although it took this tew make me realize it. I'm dying —"

"No, no! daddy," cried his daughter, protestingly. "Yes. I know it, dearest. And I see things different, naow. I've actually, if not honestly, convinced myself that certain things were not wrong, which were wrong. I played the game according tew the rules as I learned them, and excused myself by blaming custom — which isn't overfinicky in politics. I want you tew believe that, dear, and not think too badly of your dad; not think that he was deliberately dishonest in these matters. In the heat of a campaign — well, I reckon that we all say things that couldn't bear the searchlight of truth. You all know what this man, Abe Blount, has done for me, after what I did tew him. It opened my eyes tew certain things that I'd kept them closed against in the past. And now — well, there's only one thing for it. I'm baound tew make such amends as I can, and this isn't really enough. It's only a compromise with my conscience at the best, but I can't go

back on — on some of my old friends. You," he addressed the two strangers directly, "needn't enter into it. You're experts in covering up unsightly things and manipulating public opinion. I'm the only one who need be involved and for Marion's sake and my own good name I hope that you'll find some way to let me aout easy."

Suddenly he lifted himself a little and his voice grew louder and more excited.

"You've got tew agree, boys. If you don't, by the Eternal I'll go further and make another affidavit a dying man's confession — that'll spell 'Finis' for for a lot more than me, politically. Don't try tew start that discussion again. My God, you don't - you can't know haow I feel abaout this, but my mind's absolutely made up." Breathing hard, and with the cold perspiration starting in beads from his forehead, he dropped weakly back on the pillow, and the physicians hastened to administer a stimulant. More calmly he continued, in a voice hardly above a hoarse whisper, "I reckon that I got Abe Blount intew this mess, in the first place. I told him he was the logical man tew succeed me in Congress. I was simply talking then; but it's true. He is the logical man, the best man in this District. What I said was — a prophecy. This will be — fulfillment." He closed his pain-filled eyes for a moment and seemed to be on the point of fainting. Rallying himself again, he went on. "You boys have got tew come through for Abe Blount - naow. Next time - well, I shan't be hyar tew give or take orders, and you can act as your consciences "- a shadow of a wry smile appeared on his lips -- "dictate. Dew I get your promise, or have I got tew —?"

The others promised. There was nothing else for them to do, it seemed. After a few final encouraging

words, they left the room and stepped onto the veranda, their expression partly relief and partly consternation. There they held a brief consultation and finally the one in authority, seeing Omie in the doorway of the House of Happiness, called to her and asked if the State's Attorney were about. Abe had been awake all night, and now, rather weak and a little dizzy from the loss of blood, had gone to his own cottage for a brief rest. At first the girl did not wish to call him, but the stranger had a manner which, though entirely courteous, carried its own way, and she compromised by letting him accompany her to the little house on the knoll. When Abe had somewhat irritably answered to the visitor's call, and appeared, half dressed, at the doorway, Omie departed, reluctantly, for she sensed something unusual in an atmosphere which was already charged with dramatic intensity. Peaceful Smiling Pass was that day the scene of great events in the making, and she felt, somehow, outside it all, a little girl again, and wanted neither in the hospital, where her Smiles was constantly engaged, nor in the councils of men.

The visitor waited until she was out of earshot, having tacitly declined Abe's invitation to enter the cottage. Then he said, "Mr. Blount, we've never met, but I think that perhaps you know me by name. I'm

Malley."

"I reckoned so," Abe answered, noncommittally.

"Why?" asked the other, with a frank and rather

engaging smile.

"Well, you're generally tew be faound in the — not sanctum sanctorum, perhaps, but inner circle of political affairs in the State, according tew the tell. And just at present that seems tew be hyar."

"That statement may have some truth in it — and it may or may not be a compliment." Malley's smile

broadened. "I've got something of considerable importance to say to you, speaking as man to man, Mr. Blount, and I hope that you'll give me the benefit of the doubt, and assume that I'm honest, although I rather imagine that some one's been maligning me to you. Perhaps I'm not as — er — politically depraved as I've sometimes been painted. 'Give a dog a bad name,' you know. I'll start by giving you my word that the hearsay evidence contained in your now famous affidavit was a long way from being the truth. Drink inflames the imagination, as well as the stomach, you know, and the bootleggers did a lot of romancing for the benefit of your poor friend Fugate. You can believe that, or not, as you like; but I want to assure you that neither I, nor any of the others who were charged with being mixed up in a criminal evasion of one of the laws, were even in the remotest manner interested in, or party to, the - er - removal of the man who made the incriminating affidavit. Somehow, I don't relish the thought that any one would credit me with being in the slightest way accessory to murder, if it was murder, even though we lawyers are sometimes charged with the capacity for every kind of law-breaking. Oh, I don't mean that you personally --"

"You're right. I haven't a doubt but that it was murder; but the suggestion that any one, except the bootleggers who had talked too much for their own good, was implicated in it, is absurd. But all that's beside the point. You came to see me abaout poor Clayton, of course. Haow is he, naow?"

"He's dying."

[&]quot; No! "

[&]quot;There's almost no question about it, in spite of what you did for him — and as an old and good friend of Clay's I want to thank you, Blount."

"Don't. It's only what any man would have done for any other under the circumstances. But I'd hoped — You're sure that he can't pull through?"

"Yes, damn it." There was a suspicion of real moisture in Malley's eyes, and a slight break in his voice. "He knows it, himself. Weak — he's — he's done, that's all. Poor fellow. He's been a mighty likable cuss and really had more ability than some folks gave him credit for." The man removed his eyeglasses and polished them with meticulous care before replacing them. "About that transfusion of blood. I doubt your statement that any one would have done it. However, the fact remains that you did do it, and Clay — we all — appreciate it. You're — all right, Blount."

To get the conversation away from the trend which had suddenly become personally distressing, Abe responded in a lighter vein. "All right as far as I go, but I go too dommed far, as the Irishman said, per-

haps you think."

"Well, there may be something in that. We seem to differ as to political — er — methods; but I'm not going to quarrel with you on that point, now. I think that we can agree on one thing, however; the absolute necessity of electing the whole Republican ticket in

this Republican district, next Tuesday."

Almost without conscious volition the State's Attorney thrust out his hand and it was grasped by Malley. Weary and somewhat weakened, Abe was beginning to forget his hostility towards the unscrupulous party Boss and respond to the strength and personal magnetism of the man. There was something about him which inspired liking and confidence of a kind, which of course accounted for his success as a political Czar.

"You're dead right abaout that. We dew agree, I

reckon," he replied.

"Yes. Now Clayton's death is going to change the complexion of the Congressional contest, entirely. We've got to be prepared, if he dies as soon as I expect, to place a strong substitute candidate on the ballot immediately, and — well, Blount, you're the man."

"I am?" Abe spoke with utter amazement, which was not strange, considering the source of the announcement.

"Exactly. The Party Chairman has already decided

that — and I approve."

"But — but that's absurd, Malley. Look at the Primaries! Why, I'd be licked tew a frazzle. Lemos —"

"On the contrary you'll win, perhaps not in a walk, but nevertheless certainly. You can take that from one who was playing politics when you were playing with paper soldiers." Abe's memory bridged the years back to his early boyhood in the primitive, one-room cabin, and he smiled grimly. "You've felt the power of what you anathematize as 'the machine,' and of the Press directed against you; but these can be just as readily made the agents of your election, even at this short notice. Perhaps it will teach you a salutary lesson in how important a closely-knit organization, amenable to direction and discipline, if necessary, really is in this game."

"Organization's all right. What I object tew is —"

"I know — read reports of your speeches. We won't start an ethical discussion now, for this is a practical matter, and I think that the end will justify the means, even from your standpoint. Why, Good Lord, man, you ought to know by this time how easy it is to sway popular emotion first one way and then the other — you've

taken a hand in doing it yourself. And think of the sensation, judiciously handled of course, that the news of Clayton's sudden death, your own blood sacrifice in a futile endeavor to save his life, and the Republican organization's acceptance of you as a substitute candidate, with all that implies, will make! Clay's admitted one of your charges against his fitness to hold office—that he's been an offender against the Volstead law, but that won't injure his memory much. Almost everybody's doing it."

The suddenness and unexpectedness of it all had left Abe utterly bewildered; he felt much the same as might a lost spirit if Satan appeared abruptly and handed it the key of Paradise.

"I just can't grasp -- " he began, and Malley broke in with, "Perhaps it's just as well that you shouldn't entirely. But I'm stating a fact. You've got to be the candidate, and you're going to be elected. I'll tell you frankly that the so-called machine isn't keen abaout you, politically, however much some of us may admire you, personally. Just the same, you're our best bet in the emergency; I wouldn't be sure that we could put across any one else, and we can't afford to let the Party lose a single seat in Congress that can be saved. We'll lose a-plenty, in any event. Wait. I want you to understand that there are no strings attached to this, Blount. I know that you wouldn't touch it if there were. And, once more speaking as man to man, I'll add that two years from now we'll probably do our. damnedest to see that you receive a pressing invitation to remain at home."

Abe grinned cheerfully.

"Under those conditions I accept."

"Good." Malley breathed a breath of relief, for he

felt that he had extricated himself from an unpleasant predicament rather adroitly. "Will you shake on that?"

"Why not?"

Again the two men clasped hands warmly.

"How do you propose to go abaout it? Stickers?"

"Yes. They can be printed to-morrow morning and distributed to the Sheriffs to be pasted on the ballots, Sunday and Monday — if Clayton dies. We'll need the help of all the friends you can scrape up in this mountain region, although men will be sent up from Cumberland City, too. I'll keep in touch with you, and attend to all the publicity stuff, and of course you'll notify me the moment that poor Clay cashes in his checks. Now I've got to be getting back to my machine, down at Fayville. Good-afternoon, Blount."

Congressman Clayton died that evening.

The news of his passing was imparted to Omie a quarter of an hour later, and a surge of sympathy drove her to find and comfort the girl who had been so tragically deprived of father, and left alone in the world. Marion had been led to the office in the House of Happiness, Donald told her, and she sought her there, walking down the veranda softly, as one does in the presence of Death. The office windows were partially open, for the night was mild, and within the room the lamp with its green shade burned low. In the half light she saw a picture which caused her to stop, suddenly. Marion Clayton, her graceful form drooping with weariness and shaken by spasmodic sobs, was awkwardly held in Abe's comforting arms; her face was pressed against his breast. Only a fraction of a minute did Omie stand outside, an unwilling witness to the scene, but that was long enough for a few broken sentences to fall upon her ears. "Oh, Abe, he's dead, he's dead. I'm all alone, naow. I've been wicked and unjust tew you — and it hurt. But — I didn't know — and I loved daddy so. I thought —"

"There, there. I understand."

"But can you ever forgive me, Abe?"

"Why, there's nothing at all tew forgive, my child." Then Omie stole silently away, and went blindly through the night to her room.

It is unnecessary to chronicle in detail the happenings of the next four hectic days, during which sensation trod on the heels of sensation — each carefully staged and timed — and political excitement rose to fever heat. Sufficient it is to state that Malley and the other party leaders "came through" with every means at their command, and triumphantly elected the man whom they had once bitterly opposed. Abe Blount received close to fifteen thousand votes, winning over Lemos of the People's Independent Party by five thousand, with the Democratic nominee a close third. His plurality was greatly increased by the mountain vote, for the story of what he had done had been broadcast by a far older method of spreading news than either telegraph or radio, and in such a manner as to appeal to their somewhat childlike imaginations. It is fair to assume that if Clayton had lived his margin would have been a smaller one by many votes.

Moreover, the gods in the machine kept the promise which Malley had made the dying Congressman to the spirit as well as to the letter, paying their debt in full. The Governor of Cumberland called a special election at the earliest date allowed by law, and Abe was elected, without opposition, to serve out his predecessor's unexpired term, and represent the Twelfth District at the

Fourth Session of the 67th Congress, shortly to convene. He was at last "the Honorable Abe Blount."

The speed with which these various events crowded upon one another kept him up to his neck in the task of straightening out his affairs, preparatory to leaving for the National Capital, and his friends at Smiling Pass saw him very seldom. But they continued to rejoice over the unexpected turn which had taken place and his new success; none more than Omie, although the fire of hopeless love and longing still burned within her heart. With the passing days the pain of the burning diminished until only a gnawing ache remained—and then it was fanned into hot flame again by a Culverton City newspaper, which carried the following brief news item.

"New Congressman Names Secretary — Blount Selects Marion Clayton. Southern chivalry and excellent judgment are combined in the selection, announced to-day, of Miss Marion Clayton of this City to fill the responsible post of Secretary to our new Congressman, Hon. Abraham Blount. Miss Clayton, daughter of the late Representative, is widely known throughout the State and in Washington. She is not only a highly attractive and able young woman, but already 'knows the ropes' and will be of inestimable value to Congressman Blount, officially and socially, alike. We congratulate them both."

It had not occurred to Abe to comment on this matter prior to giving the news out for publication. Indeed he had not considered the matter at all or even known that he must have a secretary until he had received a letter from Marion, mentioning the fact and hesitatingly offering her services, if he should desire them. It had been a difficult letter for her to write, and, although she did not set forth her chief reason

for writing it, Abe read it between the lines, and made a quiet investigation which led to a confirmation of his guess. Clayton's estate amounted to practically nothing. He had left his development in the had left his development.

ing. He had left his daughter almost penniless.

The girl, taking his ignorance of conditions which surround a Representative for granted, had outlined the work of a secretary and the absolute necessity of his having one, at least, adding that he would incur no personal expense, since the Government made a liberal allowance for clerk hire, in addition to the amount which he would himself receive as salary.

"Ah, the first 'perquisite,'" said Abe to himself, as

he read that paragraph.

In her rather pitiful effort not to appear too importunate and too self-laudatory - for a sad blow had been imparted to her pride, when realization that she must seek employment in order to live had come, and that her best chance to obtain a position for which she was really fitted was through the man whom her father had so deeply injured — Marion had leaned backwards in minimizing her own really excellent qualifications. But she did state that she had familiarized herself with the work, to some degree, by assisting occasionally in her father's office, her name having appeared on the House payroll as an assistant clerk therein, that she knew the departmental routine, and had a social acquaintance with a great many Congressmen and other Government officials, whose friendship would be of inestimable value to a new man. She said that she was not a stenographer, but had owned her own typewriter since college days, and, although it had been chiefly a plaything, she had become a fairly rapid and accurate typist. She ended by fairly begging him not to take her if so doing would be in any way an act of charity, primarily, on his part, and please, please forget that

she had even written the letter if he had other plans in mind.

The communication both brought Abe face to face with an unsuspected necessity and an apparently ideal solution of the problem. He immediately sat down and wrote a brief, grateful note accepting her offer, never stopping to think that there might be mutual danger, as well as mutual satisfaction, in the arrangement, or even remotely dreaming that the news of it would be a heart-thrust for his closest friend.

CHAPTER IX

WASHINGTON GLIMPSES

DURING the next four months — from December, Nineteen Twenty-two to March, Nineteen Twenty-three — Marion Clayton was the center and fulcrum point of Abe's life in all its phases.

By day she ran his office, wisely and well in the main, attending to practically all of the hundred and one things which a Congressman, no longer exclusively a legislator, but in addition "errand boy" for his District, is called upon to do for constituents with a hundred and one different wants or needs.

By night she ordered his comings and goings, coaxing or almost driving him into at least the fringe of the social life of Washington's officialdom. Further he flatly refused to go, and he loathed even that little, for artificiality and he were as far apart as the poles, and most society is artificial. He felt, and was, out of place in it. His great form and homely face were bound to attract attention and made him the cynosure of many curious or amused eyes, wherever he went. He was like a police dog among Pomeranians. But the attention which he attracted and disliked was far from displeasing to his secretary-by-day and social mentor in the evening. She had not misstated the breadth of her official acquaintance and her past popularity was not impaired by her present position. So it was with keen regret that she eventually gave him up as hopeless, in that one respect, and left him, nights, to his books, or his many male friends.

Marion's interest in and success with her responsible work was in part the result of the feeling that she sim-

ply had to make good and serve him efficiently as reparation for the way she had treated him. In part, growing in strength with what it fed on, it was the result of the realization that she, who had never had to do, nor done, a serious day's work in her life, was capable of performing the task efficiently. She was actually a part of the Government itself, and things which she had once, with some annoyance, heard discussed and had straightway forgotten, took on a new and vital interest. Marion, too, had grown up, almost over night. Finally, Abe's frank appreciation of her mounting efficiency in writing businesslike or tactful letters, without suggestion from him and in carrying the routine departmental matters to a successful conclusion, spurred her to still greater efforts. His brief, occasional words of actual praise sounded sweet upon her ears. Her chief thought and aim was to lighten his work and make easier for him the unfamiliar way; but this, plus propinquity, led to other thoughts, inevita-

It was she who arranged in advance for their room in the House Office Building, writing to the Clerk of the House her preference as to the location of the office if any choice were possible, and particularly requesting that it be one other than her father's. She could not bear the thought of working in *that*, now.

It was she who decreed how the mahogany office furniture — his desk and hers, the long table, bookcases, filing cabinets, wardrobe, coat rack, folding screen and six chairs, all supplied by a generous Uncle Sam — should be placed. It was she who ordered the stationery, with his name and hers on it, and other supplies, and who fitted out his desk with every accessory. It was she —

But perhaps the story of those four months, crowded

with new sights, sensations and experiences for the man, can be epitomized in no better way than by quoting from letters which the girl wrote to her dearest chum. They contain merely random jottings on matters which appealed to her interest at the moment, and are often trivial, perhaps. But the small, seemingly commonplace things often serve as the true touchstones of character and emotion better than the more serious and obvious ones.

Not a word appears in them about the legislative career of the new Congressman. That is not strange, since it is only just now in the making; then it had scarcely commenced. He was a mere tyro in state-craft, and of a type that preferred to move slowly until he knew his ground, to wait and watch, familiarizing himself with the how and why of things, before attempting seriously to enter the arena and engage in the contest. Furthermore, he had arrived toward the end of a Congress, and his Committee assignments were few and minor ones, as was natural.

" Dec. 4.

"... This noon I went over and sat in the House gallery while Abe was being sworn in. It was surprising what a feeling of elation it gave me—no, not surprising after all, perhaps. I'm his secretary, so he's MY Member."

"... I wish I could send you a picture of Abe's face when I forbade him to shift the office furniture to suit my new arrangement, which gives his desk a little more privacy from the gaze of people passing through the hall. He will have the door wide open. I told him that it simply wasn't done—it would be a faux pas for a member to do such a thing. And it was funnier when I telephoned, and the H.O.B. superintendent sent up an assistant, two husky colored men, and a little truck to do a job which he vowed he could have done in a quarter the time with one hand tied

behind him — and I believe that he could. I never saw any one so strong. When they said that they couldn't fasten my new typewriter to the desk and that I would have to telephone to the carpenter, I thought that he would explode. He wanted to know how many men were drawing government money for helping each other loaf! "

" Dec. 6.

". . . Abe suffered another shock to-day - he must have Puritan blood in his veins. I inveigled him into going down into the stationery room to pick out a style of engraving for his personal cards, and informed him that each regular session he had \$125.00 placed to his credit to take in cash or expend in charged purchases of anything which they carry, sold at cost price. I noticed that he was looking around with unusual interest, and when we got back to the office he blurted out, 'Stationery room! There's scissors and knives, safety razors, cigarette holders and cases, purses, beaded bags, traveling bags, suit cases, toilet articles, pictures, golf things—' I might have added that a year ago he could have included leather-covered pocket flasks, but caught myself in the nick of time.* It sounded like one of our college tests on power of observation and he passed 100%. 'We can buy all of those things — plus stationery, which wasn't in evidence — at cost, out of our \$125.00 per session? 'he asked. As well as I could, I explained that the sum was an outright allowance to cover office supplies, and his to use as he liked, and whether he liked it or not, and he had me sit down and estimate what our legitimate stationery expense would be in the course of a year. The result left a balance of some hundred dollars in our — I should say, his pocket. It actually hurt his feelings. He forth-

^{*}Abe's vote later that session helped to pass, much to the disgust of certain Members, an amendment to the Legislative Appropriation Bill, as follows: "No part of the funds herein appropriated shall be used for the purpose of purchasing by or through the Stationery Room articles other than stationery and office supplies essential to and necessary for the conduct of public business."

with gave me *carte blanche* to buy whatever I liked, there, for myself. Was there ever such an unsophisticated man? It was like handing me his check book and saying 'Help yourself!' 'So, that's one of the "perquisites," he added. 'Well, go on — tell me the worst. What else do we get, free gratis for nothing?' Of course he hadn't any comment to make on our postal and telegraph franks for official business, nor yet concerning the number of books and other government publications which are coming in all the time. And he rather liked the idea of having twenty thousand packages of vegetables and two thousand dittos of flower seeds from the Dept. of Agriculture, to distribute among his constituents — although I don't, for it will mean night work for me, sending them out. I could see that he was thinking of his mountain friends, especially.*

"But when I came to the matter of mileage, he whistled again, and did some figuring on his own account. You know that our round trip from home costs about \$45.00 but he receives an allowance of twenty cents a mile, each way, or \$240.00 for the six hundred mile journey, each session. (I was always A in higher mathematics, you remember!) Abe's a single man, that means several hundred more in his purse, annually, and I told him, in jest, that he owed it to his Country to get married and spend it in bringing his wife - no, I didn't go any farther. He looked pained for a moment. I wonder if he thinks that the 'bar sinister' is raised against his ever marrying? It would be just like him to feel that way, although it's nonsense, of course. However, when he learned that mere secretaries had to pay their own fares, he insisted upon reimbursing me out of his allowance. Yes, I did take it. It was a pure matter of business, and I'm awfully hard up."

In a later letter she wrote:

"Our splendid office building is a revelation to Abe, and 'a thing of joy forever.' Of course I introduced him to the

^{*} The annual distribution of "free seeds" was also abolished by the 67th Congress.

restaurant and branch post office, but he discovered for himself the barbershop, from which they will telephone when they are ready for their 'Next'; the turkish baths and gym, and the subway to the Capitol. He pretended to be highly incensed when I told him that the one running from the Senate Office Building boasted an electric car, so that the Senators did not have to walk the two hundred and fifty underground yards, while we had to hoof it."

Again.

"Abe nearly explodes whenever he gets on the subject of procedure in the House. He can't abide the excessive formality, delays, needless debates and still more senseless speeches which so many Members make simply to get them printed in the Record, and send to their constituents. One member from Oklahoma, who is everlastingly interrupting, particularly 'gets his goat'-I reckon that you know whom I mean. On returning to the office this afternoon he remarked, 'Well, the House has just spent two hours hotly discussing a matter of which, as Elbert Hubbard once remarked, paraphrasing an earlier paragrapher, "There was nothing to be said on both sides."' Oh, well. I reckon we do the best we can, under present handicaps. But I sometimes think that our distinguished Senators, theoretically the flower of the political field, do the worst they can, pretty successfully. What's the use of our passing legislation which they won't have time to consider, what with their 'investigations' and forensic debates? They seem to have lost sight of the fact that according to the Constitution they form a legislative body.

"Abe is making a particular study of procedure and will be heard from one of these days, or I miss my guess. Taxation and National Defense are his other two legislative hobbies. He ought to be on Ways and Means, the amount of studying he does on the subject—and he'll land there eventually, see if he doesn't. He isn't satisfied with read-

ing about it, daytimes, when the House isn't in session, but must talk it in the hotel lobby, nights. Daddy never did either, I'm sorry to say — now. Speaking of the Hotel, I'm both glad and sorry that I suggested his staying there. He is in contact with a great many other Members, of course, so many live there, but it seems to me that every time I want to inveigle him into doing something of a social nature he is in the middle of a bunch of men, talking shop or telling funny stories. Of course he has become a general favorite, already, and, although he's still 'woman-shy,' men cotton to him on sight — and so do children. If he isn't surrounded by the former he is by the latter, about all the time. They hang on him, climb on him and make him tell them mountain stories or read to them. Imagine that giant reading aloud from Alice in Wonderland, or The Hunting of the Snark and enjoying it hugely! I get positively jealous, sometimes. Now don't go jumping at conclusions. It's nothing like that! But I do enjoy our frank intimacy, and do think that he's a truly remarkable character. Of course he's homely, but what of it? Yes, Captain Wiley is still attentive again this year and he is rather a dear; but - Oh, I don't know."

"January 22nd. "... I was sitting in one of the big chairs in the hotel lobby last night and overheard a Congressman behind me mention Abe Blount's name in speaking to another. Naturally I kept as still as the proverbial mouse, but pricked up my ears. In such cases one is supposed to hear nothing good, but this was the exception proving the rule, I reckon. They had just finished a hot discussion over some legislative measure, I gathered, and one said, 'Blount was right. He's had a sound legal training, but, better than that, he's got that rather rare-in-human-beings quality, horse sense. He's going to make his mark, here. Ought to be on Judiciary next year.' The other voice agreed, and added, 'There's something a bit Lincolnesque about him, and that goes for more than his looks. I'd rather listen to him spinning yarns than to Tom Heslin.' You remember the distinguished gentleman from Alabama's ability in that respect, I expect."

"February 7th.

"... As you've probably read, at least in the headlines, the President addressed Congress this noon on the British Debt Funding plan. Once I would have scoffed at the idea of getting into that crowd to hear a mere *President* speak, but I'm a changed (wo)man, now, and have quit posing, and made use of Abe's gallery ticket.

"Afterwards, I was curious to hear what Abe would say about the President, whom he had never seen before - I simply could not get him to make a formal call. He was enthusiastic. 'Every inch the man and the gentleman,' he said. 'And plenty of ability coupled with amiability; strength with sweetness, I reckon.' I told him that Mr. Harding looked older - white and tired - to me, and he answered, 'How can he help it? I don't see how any flesh and blood being stands up under four years of such a load, carried at the pace he has to follow. I guess the English are wiser than we, under present-day conditions. Two men share in the task there — the Prime Minister, who carries the Executive, and the King who bears the Social burden - and the latter is a man-size job. We make one person perform both functions, and, in the words of the cartoonist, "It's all wrong." The wonder is how he keeps from breaking down entirely, under the strain."

"February 14th.

"Can you imagine me as a proxy Congressman — who used to labor at nothing except the latest dance steps! In imagination behold me now answering the bulk of all correspondence, and forging my Chief's scrawly signature to most of it. About the only thing of a Departmental routine matter which Abe insists upon doing himself is attending to the Veterans Bureau cases. He goes down to the Arlington Building personally, on many of them, and has had great luck — if it is luck, which of course it isn't — in getting favorable results for his wounded or sick 'buddies.' Daddy

never got such compensation allowances. But ordinary letters I do, and you have no idea what a variety of things constituents appeal to their Congressman for. Some of them are too absurd, and some positively pathetic, especially letters from our mountain counties. One arrived this A.M. and here's a true copy (attest, M.C.) of it.

"'Senator A. Blount.,

"'Wite House, Washington. (That's some rapid political advance for you, from Congressman, through Senator and into the White House in two seconds!)

"'i Rite you in Regards to the Pansion Bill for the exsurvise Man Wich are asking me to Rite you. I was in the Survice and some that Was throu the Same time get a pansion. Now i Rote to the Senator and he Says that it has passed the Senut and to Rite to you and you Would in form me in the matter can you tell me if the Bill Will come up befor the Haus and if you Will use infloonce to git It thrue as some of Us are in a norful bad way Will you Please in fom me of the Matter and Sand me a cuppy of the Bill and tell me from under What hed it cumes under and i Will oblige you very much thanking you to do so i Will Reman

"'very Respectfully,"

"There, isn't that pathetic in more ways than one?

"No, you're wrong — at least I think that you are. Of course I'm just terribly fond of Abe — how could I help being? — but it isn't that — yet."

Secretary Marion Clayton also wrote the following letter, since Abe had not improved as a personal correspondent, and the typing of it, taking dictation direct to the machine, gave her heart a two-fold shock.

"February 20, 1923.

[&]quot;Mr. Virgil Gayheart,

[&]quot;Smiling Pass.

[&]quot;DEAR VIRGIL:

[&]quot;Thanks for yours of the 18th. The news about Noah

Fugate is naturally disquieting; but I was glad to have it. His mind must be unbalanced, poor lad. He has always had a 'hair trigger' temper, and the baleful influence of Tom Lemos, coming on top of his father's tragic death, has probably given a left hand twist to his brain, as you say. Omie must have had a most unpleasant quarter hour of it. It is of course needless for me to advise you to take every precaution against its happening again — I shall be home myself, in about a fortnight, and see if something cannot be done to have him restrained. Has any one any idea where he came from and returned to? My love to all of you, especially my little chum.

"Yours,

"Abe."

"February 28th.

"Please destroy the enclosed clipping as soon as you have read it — it's too awful! I'm actually praying that Abe may not happen to see it, and think that he won't, for he never reads, or listens to, 'society drivel,' as he calls it. The worst of it is that it appeared in that horrid sensational sheet just after I had been making a perfect fool of myself, and if he should read it, now, I don't know what I would do - just 'lay me doon and dee,' probably. This afternoon I had one of those all-let-down, nervous, lonesome, blue, headachy spells and of course he had to come back to the office, unexpectedly, and find me with my head down on the desk, blubbering. He was terribly shocked, of course, and put his comforting - yes, they are! - arms half around me, tried to get me to tell him what the matter was - just like a man! — and to cheer me up, when I wanted to enjoy being thoroughly miserable, for a while. 'There's nothing like a darned good cry' once in a while, you know. Oh, it was quite a touching scene, for a few moments, and I got his waistcoat all teary. You and I promised to tell each other when IT happened, and, although it didn't, as in novels, I've got to confess that if he had asked me at that particular moment I should have said, 'Yes.' A girl would be safe and

happy for life, in his strong arms. But — there is still a but.

"The clipping. 'Our newest Congressman, the Hon. Abe Blount and his charming Secretary, daughter of his late predecessor, are almost inseparable companions, both in and out of working hours — if that term can be properly applied to Capitol Hill. It is rumored that this highly satisfactory partnership may be made permanent. Well, it is no new thing for an MC to have a member of his family on the secretarial payroll.'"

"March 4th.

"Hurray for home, day after to-morrow. I've got loads of things to tell you, but I won't write them, since I shall see you so soon, and then for an exchange of confidences, as of yore. But I have news—great BIG news, too. Now I reckon that you're consumed with curiosity, old dear!

The 67th Congress adjourned, sine die, at noon to-day, after the usual hour of going-home jollification, which I witnessed from the gallery. There was the customary burial of all the little hatchets — and hammers; the fulsome eulogies of the living and (politically) dead; the jokes and laughter. There was the wonderful Marine Band making the House rafters ring with sweet but brazen sounds, and the impromptu double quartet singing old songs, in close harmony, slightly off key, and Abe was two of them - at least he sang loud enough for two. The floor was jammed, of course, but he towered above the standing crowd like the Eiffel tower above the roofs of Paris, with a Congressman's small kiddie on each shoulder, clinging to his neck and shrieking with delight. I envied them - their vantage point. What a wonderful 'daddy' he'll make for his own children some day."

CHAPTER X

THE HOME-COMING

THE Honorable Abe Blount was coming home to Smiling Pass.

He had written Virgil a scrawled note, announcing that he would be with them in time for supper Tuesday evening, and meant to spend at least a week loafing in his own new cottage, before even thinking of his new job — his secretary could run it — or making arrangements for the office which he now simply had to open at Culverton City.

Once Omie's heart would have leaped at the news of his home-coming, and her whole being thrilled with eager anticipation. Now she was horribly depressed — filled with a leaden throbbing ache. More than ever she had dreaded anything in her life, she dreaded the impending meeting. Yet it must be faced, with a soulmasking smile of welcome, if she could summon one to her lips. For a week the girl had been performing her usual tasks in a mechanical way, and with few outward signs of the inward struggle which she was going through, and which had terminated in a spiritually dazed condition.

Virgil had no idea that anything was wrong, and her mother, vaguely realizing that something was the matter, had not been able to offer any refuge or consolation. For all their filial and maternal love, there was no real bond of sympathetic understanding between them. To only one person had she been able to turn for unspoken sympathy and encouragement. "Smiles"

was with them again, for a brief time, and, although the older, wiser woman did not try to discover Omie's secret, she suspected the truth and did her utmost to lighten the burden on her heart. Between these two the spiritual bond was very strong, for Rose McDonald had been the mold in which the girl's later life had been poured; she, more than any one else, had helped to fashion it while the material was unset and pliable. The copy was not, and never could be, the same as the original, for Omie lacked some of the qualities which were native to "Smiles," and had a streak of willfulness and a deeply hidden element of primitive passion which were foreign to her mentor; but the mutual understanding was there.

Now the hour of Abe's arrival was drawing near, and a new and still more terrifying thought seized upon the girl's mind. What if he should bring Marion Clayton with him? It was unbearable. Yet the eventuality was by no means inconceivable or even improbable. He might both need her with him as his secretary, and want her as - Omie's mind would go no further. Now, as had been the case time and time again during that week, she was unable to bring herself to accept the news which had come to them. Abe's avowal to her that he would never marry had been so definite. And now - It must be a mistake; a lie! Again she felt the bitter hope that he would keep his word and never wed, rather than marry Marion Clayton. And again, as invariably, this feeling was followed by one of hot self-condemnation, which hurt worse than the others -a deliberate, yet pitifully futile attempt to be glad on his account; rejoice in his happiness. Her heart could not obey her will, for Omie was very humanly feminine, and her carefully guarded love for the man, pure and strong as it was, had its inception in the mating instinct. It lacked the divinely rare element of full self-sacrifice.

Abe might bring the other woman with him, and even expect them to take her into their home with the customary mountain hospitality, and make her welcome until he should be ready to take her into his. Again came revolt at her own imaginings. She had not conceived, happily planned and lovingly overseen the construction of that cottage-house — watching it grow until it seemed as though something of her very self had been building into it — for another to share with him. It was his in reality, but theirs in all her thoughts — a concrete fact, yet a castle of dreams. To her it was an ideal little home, but it would probably not be good enough for a Congressman's daughter and a Congressman's wife, except, perhaps, as a mountain camp; a plaything. Abe would build a big house for her at Culverton City, and then Smiling Pass would see him no more after this final week which was on the point of beginning.

The March day was as variable as the girl's thoughts, and, in the main, as dismal, although the sun occasionally broke through the hastening, leaden clouds for a few minutes at a time. She had her work in the Teachers' Training Course, which she was just completing, and school classes of her own to teach until four o'clock; but, when the last one ended and the boys rushed wildly away to the baseball field, such as it was, she could not drive herself back to the little cluster of buildings on the mountain-side, which constituted her world. She wanted to walk, walk fast and so perhaps find ease for her mind in bodily exercise.

Without thought, she turned down the road beside the swollen creek and, before she realized it, her feet had carried her unerringly to the foot of the knoll on which stood the new cottage, and she was climbing the little-used path toward it. When she did awake to her surroundings, she stopped in dismay. It would never do for Abe — and Marion Clayton — to discover her there. She half-turned to retrace her steps in haste, but desire conquered. She did so want to stay there a moment, even locked on the outside, and the man could not possibly ride those twelve miles, after reaching Fayville on the afternoon train, and get to the pass for at least an hour more — unless he urged his mount all the way, which, of course, he would not do.

Omie continued up the path, reached the cottage and placed her hand almost lovingly on the doorknob. The door swung open at the touch, and she started again with redoubled panic. Then she gave a nervous little laugh. Probably Camille, always the perfect housewife, had been there "neating it up," and left the house unlocked, so that the returning man might enter it, if he wished, without riding up to Smiling Pass for the

key.

She stepped hesitatingly inside, and straightway the spot laid its spell over her. It was quite dark there, for now the clouds overhead had become like thick, grayish-brown wool, and little daylight filtered through them. There was no rain, but the wind moaned and whistled through the trees on the mountain-side, and rattled the windows, just as it had that other evening, seven months ago, when she had stood on the same spot, pressed close to Abe's protecting body. A memory wave, so strong that it fairly overwhelmed her, set her heart to pulsating madly and the hot blood surged through her veins. She must flee at once; if the man should arrive ahead of time and discover her there it would be unendurable. Yet she stayed, leaning, weak and trembling, against the wall.

Into her confused thoughts and emotions broke a clear call from only a short distance down the creek road — Abe's own voice raised in a happy halloo, addressed rather to his home than any person. sound of it galvanized her into terrified action. must get out and make her escape, unseen, reaching her house across the wooded spur of the mountain. Omie ran to the door, and stopped. It was too late. The man had already turned his horse from the roadway and was heading straight for the knoll. Unlike practically all of its neighbors, the cottage boasted a kitchen and back door and the girl sped to it, only to find it locked. The key was probably laid somewhere in the room, but it was too dark there to find it quickly. She was fairly trapped, unless she could succeed in slipping out of the front door and around the corner of the house, unobserved. She ran back, just in time to see Abe, who had already dismounted, toss the reins over a convenient branch and start up the path, climbing rapidly.

Suddenly another memory picture rose vividly before her mind's eye. Her dream! In part, at least, it had been translated into reality. She stood in the doorway of his new home, and the man was climbing towards her. He looked wan and weary in the half-light; but distinguished appearing, for he had only added a pair of leather putties to his city-made black suit, and wore a really stylish gray felt hat, which Marion had selected for him with judicious taste. Even in her great perturbation, Omie noted these details. The recollection of the dream was so powerful that she simply could not help turning her gaze from side to side in search of a skulking, menacing form. And then—she saw it!

Slipping from one dim bush to another, with a rifle

held at his hip, was Noah Fugate; now she had no difficulty in recognizing him at once. And she knew why he was there. It had not been difficult for him to learn when his cousin was coming back from Washington, and his half-crazed brain was obsessed with but one idea — to take full vengeance upon the man whom he hated for a three-fold reason.

Omie's heart seemed to leap up into her throat and choke her. She wanted to scream a warning, but instinct caused her to stifle the cry on her lips. Now it would only be a signal for the fatal shot. With speed of thought and action greater than she had ever experienced, and with her whole being centered on but one object, to protect Abe Blount from the impending danger, she slipped soundlessly out of the door, a moving shadow merging with the shadows of the out-of-doors. Noah, his regard feverishly fixed on Abe, did not see her at all, until, with arms protectingly stretched out, she leaped downward towards the advancing man, who caught sight of her at the same instant, and instinctively reached out his arms to meet her coming. Simultaneously there came an oath from the bushes, a sharp flash and the crack of a hunting rifle.

Abe started and threw up his head, even as his arms closed about the girl.

"Noey!" he shouted. "If I catch you naow, I'll—
My God!"

Omie had slipped from his partial embrace, and, with her arms still encircling his body, had sunk to the ground at his feet.

"Omie! He — he didn't hit you!"

Abe bent and lifted her with anguished tenderness. "Yes — I reckon — so, Abe," answered the girl, trying to smile before she fainted.

Dr. McDonald came out of the little hospital, still clad in his white uniform of service, and found the Congressman pacing back and forth on the veranda in the darkness. Instinctively he reached out his hand and his hearty clasp carried encouragement.

"Then she'll—live?" asked the other, hoarsely.

"Yes."

"Thank God. Thank God for that. Is it bad?"

"Bad, but not fatal. We've got the bullet out of her side — it went clean through her, but without touching a vital organ, fortunately. She's out of the ether now, and wants to see you."

"Is that safe?"

"Yes. For a few minutes. But, for heaven's sake, keep her quiet and don't let her excite herself. She's pretty weak, and naturally a bit hysterical at present."

The Congressman went into the dimly lighted room, and Rose McDonald passed him, coming out. She caught his hand with a gentle little squeeze, and smiled mistily at him. The preceding hour had been one of the hardest in her professional life, for she loved the stricken girl devotedly.

On the narrow bed which he had himself occupied, two years before, lay the girl, her loosened hair spread in a tangle of rich brown, shot through with threads of gold, on the pillow, which was scarcely whiter than the face which she turned toward him.

"Oh, Omie," he exclaimed with pent-up emotion as he moved forward and dropped to his knees by the side of the bed, pressing his heated forehead on its edge.

Her left hand reached weakly out and, just for an instant, touched his hair. Then she surprised him by asking, with apparent irrelevance, "Where — where is Miss Clayton?"

"Marion? Why, daown at Culverton City. What made you ask that?"

"I—I thought—that you might bring her hyar,

since you're — engaged, and —"

Engaged to Marion Clayton? Whatever put

that absurd idea in your head?"

"Then you're not — not going tew — marry her?" Her voice was raised with an eagerness which brought in its train a little whimper of pain.

"Of course not. Why should I marry her — and

don't you remember what I told you abaout —?"

"But — they said that you were. And it was in the paper."

"Who said so? What paper? Good Lord!"

"Two girl friends of hers. They rode up hyar abaout a week ago to see what aour famous Smiling Pass was really like, and I heard one of them tell the other that, when I pointed aout your haouse tew them. And it was in the newspaper, too, a Washington one that I - that Virgil takes tew find aout what's going on in Congress."

"But there's not a particle of truth in it. Damn gossip, anyway. Why, I never even thought of such a a thing. I don't love her, although I admire her immensely, and goodness knows that she couldn't love

me."

"I'm — not so sure of that, Abe," answered the girl.
"Nonsense! Excuse me, but I'm a bit excited, I reckon, and I guess I'd better leave before I excite you. Dr. McDonald said —"

"Don't go," cried the girl in a low voice, catching

his hand.

"Besides," he added, "Marion has just become engaged to a splendid young army captain who's been in love with her for years; perhaps that's what her friends

meant. I'm going tew lose her in the fall, and I'll be mighty sorry, for she's been a great friend and helper. Naow, please don't try tew talk any more. You shouldn't — oh, Omie, why did you dew it?"

"I—I saw him—Noey—and—I just had tew, Abe. I'm so glad that it was me—I mean that it was I. Dew you think that I—I saved your life?

'Smiles' said I did."

"Yes. Of course you did, dear. But why did you dew it?" he repeated. "You don't know haow it makes me feel — you hyar, wounded. I would rather have been killed than have you hurt, ever so little. And tew think of — of this! Are you in much pain?"

"Not — much." She choked back a sob which was more from happiness than agony, and then continued very softly, "Abe, you just called me — dear.' Did you mean it? Dew you care for me — a little?"

"' A little'? Oh, Omie."

"And it isn't just because of — what has happened?"

The man's form stiffened and his big fingers clutched the bed clothing in his effort to restrain the words which his heart prompted him to utter.

"Don't! Please don't, Omie."

His form of answer seemed to satisfy her, for she smiled faintly. Being a woman she read at least part of the truth from his tone and expression, and she was content for the moment. Happiness struggled with weakness. She closed her eyes and remained silent for a time, summoning up new strength for the next step. At length she spoke again, in a soft, dreamy voice, which somehow sounded far away.

"A while ago I read a novel of the far Northwest, by a writer named Curwood. He said in it that up there they have a sort of unwritten law that if a woman saves a man's life she — she owns it — he becomes her property. I wish that were true hyar in aour maountains, Abe."

Despite the turmoil of his emotions and struggle to hold them under stern control, he smiled a little at her fancy and naïve wish, answering more lightly, "Well, I'm a full-fledged legislator, naow, and I reckon that I can make such a law, tew fit the case if it'll please you. I'm certainly willing tew be your slave."

And by the words he dug a pit for himself, unsus-

pectingly.

"Thank you — slave. Then you are mine tew command?"

He nodded.

"Then — kiss me, Abe."

"Oh, no. Not that, Omie."

"Yes. I want you tew — that is, if you really care."

"You know I do! I've cared, more and more, for months, although I tried not tew, because — oh, you know why. I shouldn't be telling you this, for it will make it harder for us both, if you —"

She interrupted with a brave, but softly spoken dec-

laration.

"I've loved you with all my heart, Abe, ever since that evening when we were together in your new home and the tempest came."

"I didn't know — I can't believe it, naow."

"But it's true. And I'm still waiting for you tew—kiss me."

"But don't you see that I can't dew that? It's impossible. It wouldn't be right."

"Please, Abe."

With something like a groan he arose, bent over her and — holding himself in check with all the power of his will — gently touched her lips with his.

"Again, Abe. Put your arms around me as you did that other night. It won't hurt me — just about the shoulders — I'm tightly bandaged below."

Loath to obey, but fearing to excite her unduly, he did as she had bade him. She raised herself a little, and encircled his neck with her warm, bare arms, lifting her lips tantalizingly.

"Kiss me — as though you really meant it," she

whispered, sure of him, now.

It was more than flesh and blood could endure. Every resolve vanished, and, although he succeeded in conquering the desire to crush her to him, and held her very gently, his kiss was this time all that she could have desired — on her part full surrender, on his a taking full possession. She relaxed in his arms, and settled back with a little sigh, sure of the whole truth now, and wholly content for the moment. She even, without protest, let him loosen his embrace, straighten up and turn his back to her in the hope of concealing the strength of his emotions.

"You obey orders very nicely, slave," she said at length. "But I have another, and remember I am She who must be obeyed. Promise that you'll marry me, Abe."

"Oh, why do you want to torture me like this?" he cried, sharply, wheeling about. She saw that his homely face was strangely pale, drawn and working. "You know that I can't dew that — ever."

"You mean that you don't want tew! You're a famous man naow, and I'm only a simple maountain girl, withaout much education, and —"

The note of hysteria in her voice was partly real, partly assumed; but it was effective. Before she could finish it had brought the man literally to his

knees by the bedside, crying, "You know that isn't true, Omie. I want you, you, you. I've never wanted anybody else. And you know the reason why I simply can't marry you — My name —"

"Wait, Abe! I want you tew know that the name of Blount is all I want tew bear, and I dew want tew bear it, if only for a few days. Oh, won't you promise

— even when I'm dying, Abe?"

The tears welled over in her eyes.

"But you're not going tew die! Haow can you say such a thing? Dr. McDonald told me that you would get well."

"I'm badly hurt, Abe. I think — I'm quite sure — that I can get well, if I have anything I want tew live for. But don't you know that the desire, the will, tew live is necessary if —"

"O God, what can I say?" whispered the man, brokenly.

"Why, say 'yes,' Abe. Say you promise."

He pressed his face against her arm, and answered so low that she barely caught the words, "I can't. But — if you wish it, and insist in spite of what folks will say, I — I promise, dear heart."

Omie laughed, ever so softly.

"It's pretty hard on a girl when she not only has tew ask the man she wants, but has tew 'git herself shotted' in order tew win him. I don't care, naow, but Abe I—I haven't played just fair. At first I forgot everything but you, and then I wanted most of all tew find aout if you really did love me. But after that—no, I was wicked tew make you promise that you'd marry me in spite of everything, because—oh, Abe, my dearest, I'm so happy and I'm going tew make you happy, too, for I have wonderful news for you; for us both. There isn't any obstacle any more. Please don't look at me

like that! My mind isn't wandering. It's the truth that is stranger than fiction, as 'Smiles' said."

"What — what are you saying, Omie?" The man's expression, barely discernible in the half-light, was one of bewilderment, with a suggestion of fear for the girl's reason and the dawning of a great hope. "You don't — you can't mean —?"

She nodded weakly, giving him a tender smile.

"I dew mean it, dear."

He got unsteadily to his feet and caught her pallid hand in a grip so hard that a cry of pain was wrung from her lips, and he did not even hear it.

"But it can't be true. Why, it's impossible, after all these years. Didn't I exhaust every possibility, myself? I searched the records; I hunted in every crack and crevice in aour little cabin on the chance of finding — I questioned every preacher in all these hills. I—"

"Wait, Abe. Please wait! Your maw said that the Preacher was a stranger, a 'furriner'—don't interrupt again—"

Neither had heard the light knock on the door. Now it was softly opened and 'Smiles' stepped into the room. Her quick glance took note of the tense situation, the dangerous flush of excitement on Omie's pale cheeks, and she hurried forward, saying, "Please go now, Abe. I'm afraid we've been overdoing."

"But, 'Smiles,' I have just started to tell him abaout finding—"

"Yes, dear. I understand. But Donald knows the story, and it will be better for both of you, if he tells it to Abe. You can see him again after a little while if you'll be good, now, and keep very, very quiet."

Tears of bitter disappointment sprang into the girl's pain-filled and feverish eyes, but, as the man half-stum-

bled from the room, in obedience to Mrs. McDonald's commanding nod, she dropped her head back on the

pillow and her eyelids closed.

"Yes," said Donald, in response to Abe's tense inquiry. "You bet I can tell you how it came about — Omie would have written you, if she hadn't learned that you were homeward bound, the day that she became dead sure of her facts. Let me tell you, that girl is a wonder. She thinks more of you than all the rest of the world put together, herself included, and you should bless her to the end of your days, old man."

"I shall, anyway," responded Abe, huskily. "But—for God's sake go on, doctor. If you only knew

what this means tew me!"

"I do. And I can give you an outline of the story in a jiffy — it's like something out of a book. You know, of course, that Omie acts as librarian here. Moreover, under your influence, she's become a great reader herself. Well, a few weeks ago some one sent in a box of discarded books, mostly junk, and among them was one with the title 'Memoirs of a Mountain Missionary.' She glanced it over, and, finding that it dealt with the experiences of a young clergyman from the North who had come down to this section about forty years ago, fired with zeal to help your people, and convert 'em too, read it carefully. Toward the end he'd found it tough going, and been practically ordered tew clear out, at the point of a gun — he described meeting a young mountaineer by chance, and marrying him to a remarkably lovely young girl, almost on the spur of the moment, at a spot with the picturesque name of Bear's Mouth Creek. There was something about a family feud in the account, too, and it was followed by the description of a terrific cloudburst in which he had almost lost his life, for he was riding

over the mountains, trying to make the nearest railway station." It was so dark on the veranda that Dr. McDonald could not see Abe's face, or become aware of the terrible emotion which was shaking him. continued, "The coincidence was so remarkable that Omie felt certain that she had stumbled on the truth about your parents, and she wrote to the author, sending the letter in care of the publishers of the book. It was some weeks before the answer came - she'd almost given up hope — but it was clean cut. He confirmed the details of the story as she had set it out in her letter, said that he had dug up his old diary and verified the names, and stood ready to send on a duplicate certificate — he had given the original to your father, it seems, and it was probably buried with him — and make a supporting affidavit, if — Good Lord, man! Steady. Of course it's a shock; but get a grip on yourself. All right, now?"

"Yes, thank you. But — dew you mind leaving me alone hyar for a minute? I want tew — tew think and — and pray, I reckon."

A half hour later "Smiles" McDonald came out onto the veranda again and found Abe still standing there, his big form half-illuminated by the light which now shone through the windows of the House of Happiness. Going straight up to him she held out both hands, saying, "I've just finished 'putting to bed' the future Honorable Mrs. Abe Blount — or whatever the proper form of address for a Congressman's wife may be. Perhaps I should have said 'the future Mrs. Abe Perriman,' however. Oh, I'm so glad for you both."

"No," he answered slowly, as he took her hands in his. "I think that naow I shall keep my old name—have it legalized. I've never been ashamed of it."

"And it is the one under which you have won your silver spurs. But there are still more congratulations due you. In this particular case you're a better doctor even than my famous husband, for Omie insists that she is going to be well by to-morrow morning, and start work on her trousseau in the afternoon. Abe Blount, will you kindly lean down three or four feet? I want to kiss you."

THE END

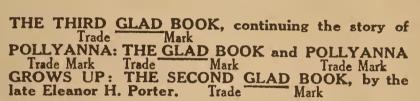


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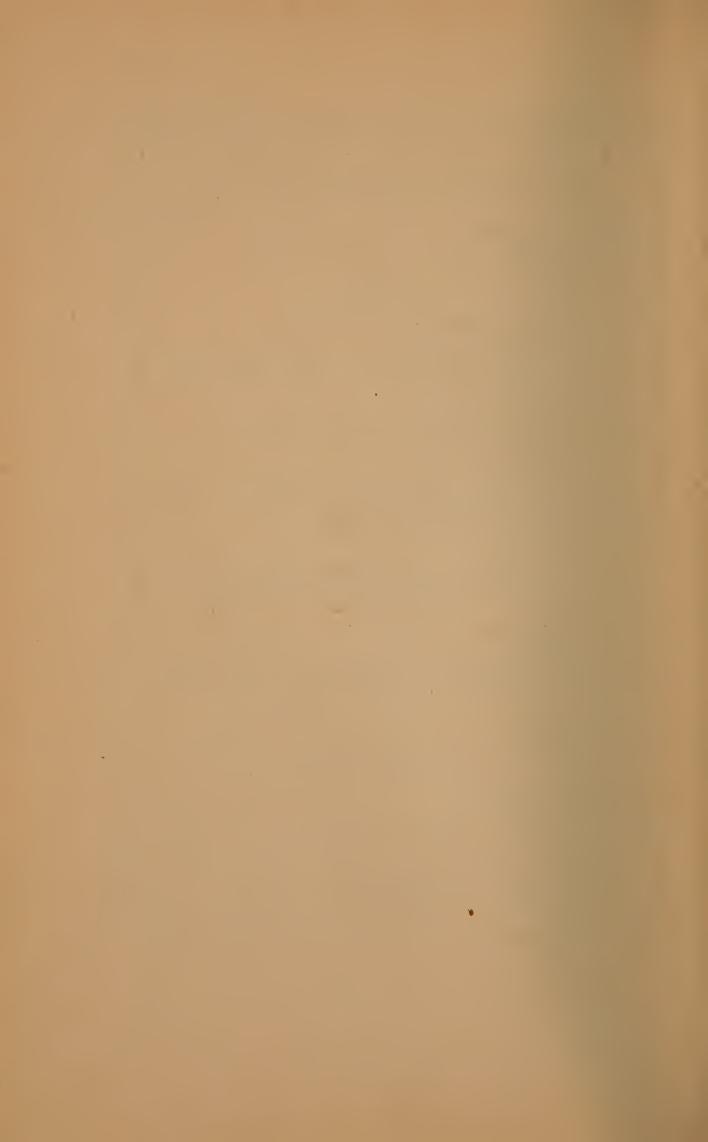
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